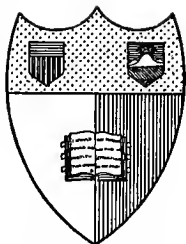


SICILIAN
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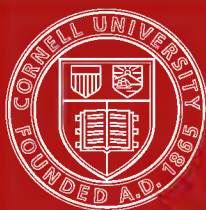


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SICILIAN STUDIES



SICILIAN STUDIES

BY

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(DUKE OF BRONTE)

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TO MY FRIEND
ROBERT HICHENS

First published in 1915

P R E F A C E

IT has been suggested that a series of stories and essays connected with life in Sicily might be of interest. Hence the appearance of this volume. Some of its contents have been printed in another form in the *Nineteenth Century* and *Fortnightly* Reviews, and the *Gentlewoman*.

I have to acknowledge my indebtedness for much valuable information derived from the works of Mr. Gilbert Murray, Sir Richard Jebb, Mr. R. D. Archer-Hind; as well as to Mr. E. D. Morshead for his striking translation of the "Oresteia" of Æschylus—the "House of Atreus."

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PROLOGUE

TO APOLLO

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TO APOLLO

“Naxos was the first settlement of the Greeks in Sicily, and they brought civilization to the island. On the shore where they first landed a celebrated altar to Apollo Archagetes was erected with a statue of the god, which stood there for ages.”

A LARGE crowd of swarthy men, with women and children, were gathered on the steep sides of Mount Toros, gazing intently out to sea.

The soothsayers—for these people, rude and savage as they were, had belief in their gods, and strove to read the mysteries that lay in the womb of time—had foretold the happening of strange things in the near future. From the holy places among the ravines of Toros had come for some time past ominous warnings of a flight of birds from oversea—birds

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with huge white wings—to alight on the shore below, and drive before them the people to their destruction.

Sceptics—they lived also in those days—shook their heads and laughed scornfully at the thought that men accustomed to do battle with the wild beasts that roamed the mountains, might fall a prey to birds of the air.

But to-day the sceptics were silent, and gazed with the others, because, away on the face of the amethyst waters, clearly defined against the sky, were seen the very birds of which the oracles had spoken. Disbelief vanished, and troubled doubt arose as to what could be that flight of monster-winged things which imperceptibly drew nearer to the people.

The more brave among the crowd bethought of arming to beat back the unknown enemy. A show of force, said they, would suffice to dismay the foe, and drive them to the far-off regions whence they came.

On glided the white wings towards the spot where the people stood. And from the bodies

To Apollo

of those strangely-shaped birds now spread great feet which unceasingly beat the water in long sweeping strokes.

Amazement and terror filled the multitude, when out spoke Sicanion, a man whose face, radiant with the pride and beauty of youth, commanded the love and admiration of the people as greatly as his sacred office of interpreter of the signs that the gods vouchsafed.

“Men and matrons, youths and maidens,” said he in a loud voice, heard by all in the still air, “be not afraid. It is given me by virtue of my office to know that the birds of great size seen on the bosom of the deep are not enemies, but forerunners of prosperity for our beloved land of sun and beauty. And,” continued he, with the radiancy that illuminates the face of one who, by divine light, foresees clearly the events of the future, “they bring you a new life of love and learning, before which the ignorance of the past must flee, as ill-omened night-birds at the approach of day. Receive them but in peace.”

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But the people would not heed. "Arm! arm!" they cried, and hurried in crowds to the shore.

Sicanion, sad, followed, for he could not tarry when others were foremost in the fight.

The great birds now took another form. The white wings had disappeared, and in their stead were seen the backs of many men bent sternly to oars that surely and swiftly brought the galleys to the land. And there, where the black lava of the burning mountain had met the sea in days gone by, did the ships touch the strand.

The fight waxed furious. Helmet and breastplate rang with the din of blows dealt by the people with weapons better fitted to the hewing of timber or digging the fields than for the art of war. But who could withstand the onslaught of the sons of Achilles, to whom war was a pastime and conquest a right? The people fell like pine-trees before a whirlwind that spares not even the king of the forest in its wrath.

To Apollo

The battle was over. The dead lay in masses around, while those of the vanquished who had survived the day were fleeing to the rocks in deadly fear, for their opponents seemed more than human in their valour and strength.

Then out spoke Theocles of Chalcis, leader of the doughty band that the white sails had brought from the Isles of Greece over the sea.

“ Brothers,” said he, “ now the fight is won and the day is ours, here, at the foot of the flaming mountain where Polyphemus has his home, here, where all the year is summer-time, and where the gods have showered countless blessings with lavish hands, let us bow our heads in gratitude and raise loud songs of praise. To Apollo Archagetes, our Protector, build we an altar of love and thanksgiving, on which fire shall always burn, for I vow in the hearing of our legions to place a statue of the god more beautiful than any seen in Greece, that both may stand on these shores as a tribute to the god and your renown. And

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that the coming centuries may bear record of you and your deeds, I name this place Naxos after the home whence you came."

Theocles was silent, while loud shouts of approval rent the air. Lifting his arms, with hands outstretched to the heavens, and turning his face toward the setting sun, which now suffused all things with a glow of ruddy light, he cried—

"O Apollo! God of Light and Learning; thou beauteous one, in whose form is united all that is most admirable; thou whose presence renders all things beautiful, look with favour on us your servants, and this land doubly blessed! To thee we dedicate this new Naxos, hard by the mighty slopes of yonder abode of eternal thunder. Grant that thy god-like presence may ever dwell among us in the sacred fire of Poesy, in the stirring notes of Harmony, and in the mystic magic of Art! And may thou guide us to seek and know the secret of all that is noble in the world, so that here may rest for all time the soothing

To Apollo

sympathy of the Beautiful and the consolation of the Divine ! ”

As Theocles finished speaking the sun sank behind Etna, casting long translucent rays across a roseate sky flecked with golden clouds. And the rays fell slantways upon the Greeks and upon the first stones of the altar, thus sanctifying with gleams of the sun-god's holy fire the regeneration of the land.

Sicanion, wounded to the death in the forefront of the battle, raising his voice and forgiving all things, blessed the words of Theocles, for he knew that the great white wings had surely brought the blessings of the gods to the country that he loved so well.

**THE GREAT
DISASTER**

THE GREAT DISASTER

“All in a moment overwhelmed and fallen.”—MILTON.

THE recurring anniversary of that which has been recognized as one of the greatest catastrophes in history, recalls vividly and with no diminution of horror, that direful night preceding the 28th of December and its following weeks. Nor have recent visits to the scene of the earthquake at Messina helped to mitigate that feeling, since little has been done to remove its traces and renew the city. Of money there seemed once to be an abundance ; offers from foreign contractors to clear the *débris* and reconstruct the buildings have not been wanting ; but either a spirit of misplaced independence has scorned outside help, or the usual bureaucratic dilatoriness and inadequacy have prevailed. Thus the horrors and chief

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features of the calamity still linger ; and these few observations, made on the spot at the time, may prove of interest from a psychological standpoint.

If it be true that wine reveals truth, no less does terror draw aside the veil of human conventionalism to show the true character of men and women beneath. The greater the terror the more evident are the signs betraying individual characteristics ; because insincerity (which is also a distorted form of self-protection) being laid aside, the real human being stands out as Nature made him. At least, so it appeared to me during the days which succeeded the disaster which razed Messina and Reggio to the ground and destroyed many other towns and villages of Sicily and Calabria.

The events of the fateful night in the small and well-known hill town of Sicily, where I was at the time, may be briefly related thus.

At 5.20, when the morning was yet dark except for the brilliancy of many stars in a cloudless sky, and when the inhabitants were

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sleeping after the Christmas merrymaking, a violent upheaval of the earth, accompanied by a dull rumbling, awoke me. That was followed immediately by a convulsive shaking, which made me realize what a rat must feel when in the mouth of a terrier. I wondered how long that shaking would last. The first thought of those who live in "earthquake countries" is as to the duration and force of a shock, and whether it be wiser to take refuge in the open air. It seemed as if that trembling would never end. It lasted half a minute, though the instruments in the Messina Observatory, which were not destroyed, recorded thirty-five seconds as the duration of the greatest shock. Elsewhere in Sicily it was less. Then the roar of many waters was heard. It was the advance and receding of the seismic waves which added devastation to that of the earthquake.

Shouts, wailings, imprecations, desperate cries of terror and of appeal to the saints, accompanied by the barking of dogs, came from below and resounded from all quarters of

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the town. The still night suddenly became one of indescribable uproar. As if by magic windows were illuminated as electric lights were turned on by the awakened sleepers. The clamour continued as shock succeeded shock. People precipitated themselves from the houses in costumes hastily improvised.

A cry of "San Pancrazio !" was raised, and a crowd of awe-stricken people hurried, lanterns in hand, to the church of their patron saint on the side of the hill outside the town.

There, filling the church to overflowing, they prostrated themselves before the image whose help they had come to invoke. Humility and penitence, tearful supplication and agonized fear were marked on anxious faces dimly illuminated by the few hastily lighted candles on the altar. Outside in the arched court the people also knelt, calling aloud for protection, muttering audible prayers accompanied by sobs.

The east reddened with the dawn. The

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earth shook at intervals. Later, more of the population, headed by the town band, hurried to the church. By common consent it was agreed that the saint should be taken to the town to assure greater protection by his presence. It was then daylight.

Amid the clanging of bells, shouts of the people, and solemn music, the large figure of San Pancrazio was carried shoulder high by many willing bearers from the sanctuary into the ante-court, and thence up the steep path to the arched gateway of the town.

The populace filled the streets ; the slight balconies were perilously packed ; the band played lustily ; and the huge procession, gathering in numbers as it went, passed from one end of the town to the other. It was a moment of exhilaration which lasted but a short time.

In the small space between two castellated gateways, the image was lifted from the shoulders of its supporters and placed on the ground. The many who helped to carry

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the heavy shrine wiped their foreheads, hot with exertion.

The little piazza was crowded. Locomotion was difficult. All elbowed their way towards the saint, who, seated on his gilded throne and clad in gorgeous vestments with a jewelled mitre on his head and a crozier in his left hand, while the right was raised in the act of blessing, received homage from the faithful.

Now that the music and the shouts of enthusiasm had ceased, the faces of the crowd became again sad and full of concern. A silence fell upon the multitude. The danger had been so recent and alarming that terror resumed easy sway. Priests in *biretta* and *camicia* ; aged women with faces scored with lines ; old men supported on sticks ; women and girls in bright-coloured dresses and gaudy kerchiefs about their heads ; men, youths, and boys with lighted tapers in their hands, formed that remarkable crowd. All were pensive, solemn, pale. They muttered prayers and invocations, using their hands in supplication.

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Many were in tears. It was a strangely impressive gathering, which had but one common feeling—that of abject fear and apprehension. Women crossed themselves. “Madonna mia,” they said mechanically, calling upon the Virgin and saints in turn. “Quando mai, quando mai,” queried an old man tearfully to himself, shaking his head. He had never known so awful an earth-shock, so great a terror, as this.

The calamity appeared to draw people together. It was brotherhood of grief. Companionship was essential; solitude unbearable. They communicated their woe by expressive gestures, as is their wont, not by words. Words were inadequate to convey the depth of their despair. That silence of a garrulous and laughter-loving people measured the “deep mysterious fear” which pervaded all minds. The strident voices of the women were hushed. Ragged urchins were mute, and wandered aimlessly about, their tricks and their games forgotten. Even the whining beggars

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omitted to ask for alms—the money collected that day was to propitiate the saint, and not for them. An undefined yet overpowering sense of the dreadful was abroad ; it deepened as the hours passed. Had they known the fate which had befallen Messina and Calabria, with the loss of kinsfolk and friends, cries of lamentation would have broken that silence. But the direful knowledge was yet to come.

The procession was re-formed. As the saint was raised once more on the shoulders of his half-hundred bearers, and wended his way to his temporary abode in the mother-church, patereroes roared, bells clanged, men cheered, and the throng pushed forward eagerly to serve as escort and guard of honour. The saint entered the big church through the west door. The building, in spite of danger from the continuous shocks of earthquake, was crowded from end to end. The congregation rose as the procession went in. The sacred burden was deposited before the high altar ablaze with the light of many tapers. The organ

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took up the music as the band ceased ; the religious function began.

What has been related was the visible result of the earthquake in men's minds. But it seemed to me there was more of interest beneath the surface. It is certain that all who had had a share in the alarm of the morning had undergone a change wrought by a shock so sudden and severe. How had it affected them? That was my thought when I looked at the upturned faces of the congregation as they listened rapturously to the discourse of the gentle and intellectual young priest who addressed the multitude from the pulpit.

How had it affected him? I can imagine that pity was the foremost feeling in his mind—pity for the sorely distressed and panic-stricken souls about him, with gratitude for a merciful escape from death which had been so imminent.

But that was a theme scarcely touched upon as he spoke. True to his calling and training, he sought rather to impress upon the people

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the teaching of the Church and a proper observance of its precepts. It was an address to the poor and lowly. Pointing to the sacred figure of the saint before the altar, he told them in eloquent words that the disaster was a direct visitation of Heaven for their neglect. There could be no doubt of it. The following day was marked in the calendar as the name-day, or *festà*, of the saint. No preparation had been made to honour him. Though the town was rich and prosperous, they had neglected him for many years. The preacher blamed them for their laxity. He called upon them to cease from their neglect; from swearing; from lying; from thieving, in order to merit his protection. He ended by proclaiming a solemn feast-day, to be held later in these troublous times as a sure means of securing the saint's favours, and propitiating his wrath.

It was a moment well chosen for such a theme. That it was not distasteful was evidenced by the eagerness with which the

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very poor, also, put their pence into the collecting bags assiduously circulated throughout the church for the cost of the coming *festa*.

His words produced the effect intended by the preacher. Assured of the protection of the saint, the haggard look of apprehension, that startled look in the eyes which I had noticed earlier in the day, softened. Courage returned as loud *evvivas* for the saint echoed through the building at the preacher's call.

In times of disaster, the Southern Italians, who may have been led astray from, or are indifferent in regard to, religious observances, become very devout. When the cholera epidemic ravaged Sicily; when Vesuvius was in eruption more recently; and now in this much graver calamity, the churches were, as they are now, crowded with worshippers, returned once more to the fold in ecstasies of devotion and contrition.

Later, when the church had emptied of all but a very few, I noticed that one very old woman remained at the side of the enthroned

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saint. I watched her. She could have had nothing to lose by the earthquake, because she probably possessed nothing but the few rags which covered her and the stick on which she leant so heavily. But her tears and her sobs, and the ardent kisses impressed on the gilded slipper of the saint, might have indicated dread for the loss of countless treasures. Was she fearful that her beloved *paese* might be destroyed? that the few suffering years which remained might be denied her? Or was it the fear of the unknown and the terrible which assailed her? I imagine it was the last. But whatever it was, she alone of the many worshippers of the morning remained in supplication at the feet of him who from her childhood she had learnt to believe was her intercessor for protection and pleader for divine favours in this world and the next.

Another attracted my attention, and she also a woman. She sat motionless and speechless on a seat. Her eyes, staring and expressionless like the unclosed eyes of a corpse, were

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fixed on the face of the saint. Intense fear had removed any visible sense of alarm and almost all signs of life.

Fear, in fact, reigned supreme on all sides, and increased as the greatness of the disaster became known. It manifested itself in different ways according to the individual. It generally took some form of egoism. One man was moved to tears at the sight of the universal destruction at Messina. Yet his chief lamentation was a complaint that God had deprived the land of that peace and well-being in which he himself had so greatly delighted. Another, and he a public functionary, refused to attend to his duties because some remote property of his had been slightly injured. So complete was the demoralization, no work was done for a week after the earthquake, although no damage had been caused in the town itself. The great violence of the shock of earthquake alone had produced the panic.

Groups of idlers, talking in subdued tones, paraded the streets. They had been there all

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day. They would be there all night. Few would risk sleeping under a roof. Tales of warning and premonition of the disaster were many. Predictions of wise women were recalled. Dreams were related below the breath. "The death-fires had danced at night"—the *ignis fatuus* had been seen the evening before. It had floated over the sea, where it hovered in a long, serpent-like form of glowing vapour, weird and unearthly. It had risen to the hills until near the little cemetery of the town, where, lingering a short time, it disappeared, to be seen no more.¹

Towards evening vague rumours concerning the fate of Messina were in circulation. Nobody could tell from what source they came. The idea that the city of a hundred and sixty thousand inhabitants had been destroyed, was scouted. Men smiled and would not believe it. It was the usual exaggeration of the vivid Southern imagination.

¹ This curious phenomenon, of electric origin, was seen by a friend, who related the occurrence to me.

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At nightfall, however, a man, dazed, terror-stricken, and nearly naked, came. He had run along the railway line, a distance of twenty miles or more. He had fainted on the way for want of food. He was shortly followed by two others. They confirmed what the first-comer had related: that Messina had been entirely wiped out in half a minute's time; that the population was buried beneath the fallen houses.

Until then men and women had thought but of their own troubles: the panic of the early morning and the great danger they had run. Now the conversation in the streets turned to the graver topic, and stupefied wonder took the place of fear. From that time "Death all eloquent" was the dread master of eastern Sicily. "Messina non è più." It was first whispered in doubt and perplexity. Then it was borne to all lands as a message of woe unprecedented. "Messina non è più." Messina, "the Beautiful," exists no longer. No words can paint in true colours

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the hideousness of what she is, of the first hours of trial through which she and her people passed.

The poet¹ must have pictured some such scene when he wrote :—

An universal horror
Struck through my eyes, and chilled my very heart :
The cheerful day was everywhere shut out
With care, and left a more than midnight darkness
Such as might e'en be felt.

But not even the mightier pen of a Euripides could describe adequately the hideous and far-reaching torment of those who suffered by those awful throes of Nature.

It is well to pass over, without further comment, the episodes of heart-rending mental anguish and bodily injury ; the sufferings from thirst and hunger ; the isolation and abandonment of the first days ; the terror of continued shocks ; the raging fires ; the nakedness ; the hopeless searchings for missing relatives ; the shrieks and lingering tortures of the thousands

¹ Rowe.

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beneath the fallen masonry, to whom help never came.

“Messina non è più.” The long line of stately palaces which looked upon the harbour and the lilac mountains of Calabria are but mounds of lime dust and broken stone, of beams and broken tiles. Where a façade stands, it stands in mockery to cover the ruin within, because back and side and inner walls lie in heaps to the level of first-floor windows. The broad quay has sunk several feet. Where boxes of fragrant fruits and bales of silk and merchandise once were seen, the sea leaps over stones displaced. Whole streets have disappeared ; and should one wish to seek where a friend had lived and now has died, nothing remains to guide him to the spot.

Nature was capricious in her modes of destruction. A solitary house remained erect where all else had fallen. But its walls were rent with broad fissures, widening with each fresh movement of the earth, a make-believe

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to beguile the onlooker. Here, the front had fallen, leaving the building with rooms exposed like a doll's house with open door. The rooms were undisturbed and furnished, as of old, with a breakfast-table laid in one ; beds and furniture intact in others, with mirrors on the walls, the doors ajar, through which the occupants had endeavoured to escape. There, slender and giant columns of masonry stood upright, or leant against opposite walls tilted over bodily. Below were fragments of what the houses contained. Pianos half buried, chairs, tables, curtains, bedsteads, pictures, and broken mirrors ; and it was sad and solemn to look upon the mattresses upon which some poor victims had met their fate when sleeping peacefully. The havoc was fearsome ; the destruction complete. Only the houses of two stories remained as possible, if risky, habitations in the future.

Perhaps the most remarkable, and the most pitiful, of the ruins to-day, are those of the *Duomo*, or Cathedral, which had stood so many

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centuries, now to be overthrown. The monster monoliths of granite with gilded capitals, which once were the columns of Neptune's Temple at Faro, lie half or wholly covered by the painted woodwork and *débris* of the roof, among which are fragments of marble tombs and inlaid altars, golden figures of angels and sculptured saints—a mountain of ruined masonry many feet high and open to the sky. The beautifully carved pulpit has been hurled to the ground, together with the pillar which supported it, with the mosaic and frescoes, with the arches and cornices, which made the *Duomo* so rich a treasure-house of art.

One thing alone remains of the ancient glory—the colossal figure of Christ in mosaic in the dome of the apse at the east end. It is still there, with serene countenance and hand uplifted in the act of blessing, as for five hundred years or more it has remained, gazing on the passing generations of worshippers. The calmness of that majestic, life-like figure was, and still is, startling. I turned from it

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resentfully. "How can a blessing rest on such awful destruction as this?" I exclaimed involuntarily. Then it was suggested by a friend that that benediction might reach beyond the church, beyond the fallen walls of the ruined city, a message of peace and consolation in the hour of need to souls in anguish of mind and body; and I was glad that the apse had not been destroyed.

Not only did the earth claim its many victims. The sea also added its terrors to the calamity. In a manner it was more far-reaching in its destruction, for where the earthquake sought and destroyed the living only, the seismic waves swept over the English cemetery, razing its walls to the ground, demolishing the tombs and marble monuments of the dead.

To the villages of the Messina littoral the sea brought, perhaps, greater ruin than the earth. A wall of water, in some places ten feet, in others thirty feet high, rushed inland with terrific force, and devastated groves and

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gardens, roads and houses. Crowds on the quays and shores were swept away and drowned. Lemon-trees and big bushes of cactus-pear were torn up by the roots and scattered in dire confusion. Boats on the beach were lifted and carried a distance of two hundred yards, scattered in the fields and streets, or jammed in the narrow doorways through which the receding waters rushed. Houses were either washed away or fell in a pile of masonry. If many victims were carried out to sea, others remained beneath the stones. The lamentation of the surviving villagers, for many days out of reach of succour, was piteous and heart-rending. One woman, who had lost her only son, had recovered a portion of his clothes from the ruins of her small house. These she handled fondly, or put them about her shoulders, laughing and weeping alternately. When laughter accompanies tears the lowest depth of mental suffering has been reached.

A few steps from her a man sat on the pile

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of stones and dust which had been his home. Beside himself with grief, he addressed the heap of rubbish : " If the sea has not got them, they are here, here beneath my feet," he said. He referred to his wife and three children who had disappeared. Another incident is related. A man, who had escaped with other members of his family, returned hurriedly to look for a missing child. The bed on which the infant had slept was there, though the back wall of the house had fallen. In place of the child he found a live fish where the infant had been lying. Nature was grotesque as well as cruel.

The immediate and almost universal effect that the earthquake had on those who escaped death was of stupefaction, almost of mental paralysis. They were stunned. Their power of judication of the catastrophe was suspended. Lamentation was infrequently heard except when caused by physical suffering. Tears were rarely seen. Men recounted how they had lost wife, mother, brothers, sisters, chil-

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dren, and all their possessions, with no apparent concern. They told their tales of woe as if they themselves had been disinterested spectators of another's loss. Some even spoke with a smile on their lips. Any one who does not know the Sicilian and his remarkable regard for family ties, might have been inclined to attribute that composure to callousness. He would have been wrong. For the time being, the minds of the people had been mercifully deadened. They had not realized. Therein Nature had shown tardy pity.

In one of my visits to the stricken villages I offered a seat in the motor-car to an official. He had gone out from Messina in search of lost relatives. He told me he had escaped miraculously from his falling house, by which his wife had been buried and killed and his daughter horribly mutilated. He could get no news of his son at school at Reggio; he was certain he too was dead. But no sign of sorrow, nor even of mental disturbance, was apparent as he spoke. Beyond a strange per-

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functoriness in his actions during the hour or more he was with me (he willingly lent a hand to extricating the car from the sand of the seashore on which it had been driven in the hope of reaching Messina, the road being impassable owing to fallen walls), I saw no sign of the despair which would follow later. Another man told me, with eagerness and satisfaction, how he had escaped after three days of imprisonment below the ruins of the house where others of his family had met their death. He had had nothing to eat; he had no recollection of the passing of time. Indeed, when rescued he thought he had been buried a few hours only. He had scraped at the *débris* with his bleeding fingers until he had groped near enough to the surface to make his cries heard. He, too, uttered no complaint, no lamentation. Seemingly it had been to him an adventure which was not altogether unpleasant. Such examples of impassibility were without end. Yet in the eyes of those who lived through that dreadful period a dazed look of horror and consterna-

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tion lingered as silent witness of the terror which was theirs.

It is difficult to account for the almost complete, if temporary, absence of the emotion usual on occasions of calamity in people who are naturally easily roused. A Sicilian is not infrequently moved to tears, and by little provocation. A small contretemps is apt to upset the even tenor of his easygoing existence. The trivial illness of a relative, the unexplained absence of a friend, will fill him with apprehension and arouse plaintive comment; but when he was the sufferer by one of the gravest calamities in the history of the world, he was placid, calm, and resigned.

This is interesting psychologically. That coldness is largely due to the inability of the human brain to appreciate events at their true value. Perception had been dulled by the awful suddenness, as well as by the stunning severity of the blow. There was also the association or sharing with others, engendering a sense of companionship in misfortune, which forbids one individual to exalt

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his sorrow over that of others. As suffering is measured by comparison, so is grief kept within bounds in the presence of other grief. Thus the appeal for commiseration which a stricken heart makes on ordinary occasions becomes futile; self-restraint follows as a matter of course, and resignation is its outward manifestation.

But though this may be so in great measure, the onlooker could not fail to attribute some of that same remarkable resignation to a more lofty cause. Many examples of a noble heroism, passive as well as active, were noticed. And though Sicily, with her proximity to the East, has not escaped the influence of the Oriental philosophy of "Che sarà sarà," which is the native's constant solace in moments of adversity ("Come vuole Dio," is often his final *résumé* of a distasteful matter), the fibre of true men and the courage of martyrs were not wanting in those days of bitter trial.

The cities and towns of Sicily (those of Italy were not behind in the work of charity)

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opened their doors to their suffering fellow-countrymen with a generosity that was as large-hearted as it was spontaneous. Catania alone received twenty thousand refugees ; housed them, and cared for them, though at a cost of great self-sacrifice. All, from the richest to the poorest, vied with one another to clothe, feed, and comfort them. Orphans were adopted or otherwise provided for. In this work Sicilians have led the way pre-eminently ; for it must be remembered that the presence in their midst of so many indigent persons constituted a serious sociological problem, in which the vital interests of the charitable themselves were involved. Employment was by no means plentiful. Trade was bad. Commerce was almost at a standstill. Therefore the flooding of the labour market at such a moment was attended with serious complications and fears.

“ Death all eloquent ” reigned in that island of sweet-scented groves and luscious fruits, where many have found repose for mind and body amid flowers and genial sunshine. Yet

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it has been always a land of joyful resurrection, whose return to life has been sung from time immemorial in its poetry and its legends. True to tradition, Messina and its villages, with Reggio and the Calabrian towns beyond the narrow streak of sparkling sea, are rising again. The Sicilian's love for his birthplace took him back as soon as he could return. The cities are being rebuilt with the courage and determination which are his own. Here, again, the Oriental belief in fate is seen—"Che sarà sarà." If another earthquake is to come, come it will, no matter where man may dwell!

But those who were present; those who suffered when the sullen anger of the "deathful earth" wrought "universal horror"; those who have looked "on the dreadful thing" and lived; can never in brighter days be quite as they were before, nor entirely free from the remembrance of that sense of littleness before a greater Presence, which was perhaps the first, as it is the abiding, feeling following in the train of the overwhelming disaster.

**SAN FILIPPO
LEAVES
HIS SHRINE**

SAN FILIPPO LEAVES HIS SHRINE

FOR many weeks in spring rain had been looked for in the lower lands around Etna. The peasants had prayed for it, not only with the hope of reaping the usual harvest in due course, but to enable them to sow spring seeds which might help them should the fields ploughed in winter fail—as they seemed likely to fail—to furnish the year's supply. Prayers to patron saints, votive offerings of wax candles, shrines garlanded with flowers, statues bedecked with finery, pious trust, tearful complainings—all had been so far of no avail to bring rain, for the *tramontano*, or north wind, had waged continuous war with the moisture-bearing winds of the south, and chased away the heavy banks of cloud as they rose from the sea or settled on Etna's summit. In

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Sicily, a good shower at spring-time is as gold ; and a steady downpour means happiness and abundance for the poor and comfort to the rich ; they bring on the growing crops of grain for the one, and for the other defer the scorching time of summer when springs run dry and all things living are parched and weary with heat and dust.

So the Festa of San Filippo Neri at Calatabiano was anxiously anticipated this spring, for every one knows, who knows anything of the good deeds of the holy saints who protect the poor of Etna's slopes, that San Filippo has much to say about harvests of all kinds on the day which is particularly dedicated to himself. And this is what they know. The saint is pleased to visit his people once a year, and for that purpose leaves his home in the church at the summit of the mountain behind the town. It is the saint himself, of course, though to suit his own convenience he takes the form of a majestic image sitting in a chair of state. On his descent to the *madre chiesa*,

San Filippo Leaves His Shrine

or parish church, the abundance or scarcity of harvests depend. The journey must be rapid, without mishap, and the progress dignified, if San Filippo's protection for the coming crops be secured. Around Calatabiano that means a great deal. Not only the harvest of hay and corn has to be garnered, but crops of many kinds gathered well-nigh all the year. The golden fruit of the orange and lemon-trees is picked and packed in the winter months, giving abundant work to women and boys, who climb among the dark foliage to clip the fruit from the branches and tenderly hand it to those who wait for it below ; for not a bruise nor mark must mar the shining surface of lemon and orange if the fruit is to bear the journey to distant lands, where much of it is sent. Artichokes and cool lettuces, peas and other vegetables, delicacies for the tables of the North, follow quickly. Then earlier fruits, such as mountain strawberry and yellow loquat, fall to the hand in rapid succession, while the almond, already formed in its velvet-green husk

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from the undulating waves of white and pink blossom, which had covered hills and valleys as with fallen snow some few months previously, are picked and sent away. The sickle lays low the beans and hay, and soon afterwards is seen in the rippling fields of yellow corn. A short respite comes to the workers—except where the ripened almonds and maize with the hazel nuts of the upper lands are secured—before the grapes are carried to the winepress by gangs of brown-skinned people, their heads turbaned in kerchiefs of every hue known to mortal eye, accompanied by sound of bagpipe and tambourine. The Indian fig, or prickly pear (in spring-time with its golden-cup flowers fringing the oval-shaped leaves), growing in Eastern profusion in hedges or among the rocks of lava, next yields its salmon-coloured fruit. And lastly the olive, to give the oil to make man of that cheerful countenance of which we read. So San Filippo has all his work prepared for him. It is but natural that the people should anxiously await this

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festa, and learn whether plenty, with peace of mind withal, or scarcity, with consequent anxiety, shall be their lot for the next twelve months.

It was to be present at this *festa* that we drove down "the long ranges of the hills" of Etna. A more beautiful drive it would be difficult to find. Our road was that of Himilcon, when, two thousand odd years ago, after the destruction of Messina, finding a lava stream opposing his march to Syracuse, he took a circuitous route to reach his destination. He followed the course of the Alcantara River, which runs through a narrow valley formed by high mountains covered at their base with orange-trees, with hazel and chestnut groves on their precipitous sides. A town or two perched on the summits of apparently inaccessible rocks, cling desperately over the contributory torrents which join the principal streams. Beautiful ravines are bright with young foliage, and with flowers of all colours, from the pink oleander growing in large

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masses, and patches of yellow broom, to the hedges of double scarlet geranium. Crowning all—

Etna beyond in the broad glare
Of the hot noon, without a shade,
Slope behind slope, up to the peak, lies bare ;
The peak, round which the white clouds play,¹

which dominates the scene and forms the distant background of many a beautiful picture. Lower down, the dried-up country speaks to the drought of the season, and we arrive at Calatabiano, hot, and in a cloud of dust, which covers all things in a powdering of white.

The town is in holiday garb. Triumphal arches span the principal street ; flags flutter, and paper lanterns swing from every window. Far up on the mountain, where nestles the home of San Filippo among the almond-trees and prickly pears, patereroes roar in his honour. The ways are full of countryfolk who have flocked from the mountain hamlets, and

¹ M. Arnold.

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the sea has sent its contribution from the fishing villages near. Daphnis finds his counterpart in the bright, slim youths of the pastures, who have left their flocks and herds to take care of themselves to-day; and our two old friends,¹ Asphalion and his comrade, might be said to have wandered from their wattled cabin on the shore, their poverty and their dreams, to join in the fun. Booths for the sale of roasted beans and nuts—to munch these from morn till eve is part of the mixed ritual of the *festa*—driving a roaring trade; and roaring it is indeed, for the shouts of the vendors crying their goods deafen the bystanders as much as the clanging of the bells and the firing of the miniature cannon. Butchers' shops are hung with joints of meat to be cooked in improvised ovens on the hillside: to eat these in honour of San Filippo is also part of the programme, as well as the broaching and quaffing of many a cask of ruby-coloured wine. A good trade in roughly carved and gaudily painted images

¹ Theocritus, Idyll XXI.

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of the saint is carried on ; and thrifty souls, combining business with pleasure, bargain for the hay-prongs and straw hats that are offered for sale. Stalls showing goods of less peaceful intent are not absent : there are trays of those clasp-knives of long blade so dear to the Sicilian for defence or offence—knives without which no man goes, and which frequently send his enemy to the grave and himself to the galleys.

The saint is soon to leave his shrine and visit his people who have selected him as their special pleader to Heaven, and we, with the others, await his coming impatiently. The spot where we stand is on the side of a valley opening to a dark blue sea. The pathway runs up the valley at a sharp incline ; diverging to the right, it leads to a spur of the hill at a still more striking gradient. It is very stony and the surface very uneven. All along the path, dotted about in countless groups on the sides of the ravine, everywhere, in fact, where protruding rocks give foothold

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or secure resting-place, are many hundreds of peasants, the women in petticoats of many bright colours, with bodices of another colour, and handkerchiefs of yet another colour still tied under the chin, fresh, new, and striking, as befits a festal day in May. Here a bevy of them sit in a row in a tribune-like terrace, exchanging laughing remarks with passers-by ; there, groups of three or four lounge in graceful attitudes characteristic of the race. The men—generally apart from the women, for much of Eastern life still holds in Sicily—are there in multi-coloured cravats and slouched hats, more quiet than the womenfolk. Some of the older wear cloth breeches and gaiters, with linen showing at the knee-joint, moccasins on their feet, on their heads the Phrygian cap, the fashion of twenty centuries ago. Men so attired are few, however, for the tendency of the age here, as elsewhere, is to be up to date in dress as in other things, and the picturesque costumes of the past are fast disappearing. It is a laughing crowd, full of the enjoyment

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of doing nothing at a time of day when the later breezes had succeeded the burning heat of the sun.

Patereroes and shouts on the heights announce that the saint has left his shrine, and the procession, preceded by a crowd of shouting boys and men, appears high up on the brow. "Viva San Filippo!" bursts from hundreds of throats. All eyes are turned to the path above, and anxious inquiries are made as to the manner in which the saint is descending. Shouts are redoubled when it is seen that his progress is sure and rapid. Under a canopy of carved and gilded wood, supported on five massive columns, the saint sits in state. He is clothed in dalmatica and chasuble of white silk heavily embroidered in gold; a silver crown is on his head, and his right hand is raised in the act of blessing. In his left hand he holds a silver missal. The saint and canopy are of immense weight, and are carried in the centre of two long poles raised on the shoulders of many men at each of the four

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ends. Thus is his progress made, though in the eyes of the faithful neither the poles nor the stalwart shoulders are deemed to have anything to do with his descent, for is he not known to come of his own free will to visit his beloved people of the town?

The supreme moment of the year has now come to the inhabitants of Calatabiano. To the farmer with his rent to pay; to the small proprietor, who remembers his visits to the inexorable tax-gatherer every two months; to the husbandman, tilling the small plot of ground to which he and his family look for subsistence; to those who pray for favours unvouchsafed, such as the maiden longing for a suitable mate, the gambler in quest of the winning numbers of the lottery, and the devout looking for the manifestation of Heaven: the coming of the saint is equally an omen of good or evil for all of them. No general of old ever consulted the oracles before a battle with more anxious thought than possesses these

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simple people to-day, as they gaze upon the face of the saint as he draws near them—a black face : and why not black, since we know that Our Lady and Child of Einsiedeln and many another holy image are black also? And is not the saint's name Neri, which may perhaps account for the choice of the wood when the saint was sculptured by hands immortal or otherwise, as the case may be? No matter what the colour of his face, however, since the look of it is so benign and his goodness so great. Thus, at least, thinks a poor woman with a baby at her breast and trouble in her heart (if looks be index to the mind) who stands on the opposite side of the way. As the gilded burden swings round the corner of the path at breakneck speed, amid frantic cheers of onlookers and louder cries of the bearers, who find the weight terribly heavy and dangerous on the precipitous and rocky path, that woman's face is a mirror of the human sentiments of anxiety and then of joy, since all is going so smoothly and so well.

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This coming of the saint means much to her ; she cries aloud in her contentment.

But alas for mortal hopes ! A false step, a foot placed on a rolling stone, a stumble, and the foremost bearers of the holy image on one side are on the ground. Consternation is extreme, and dismay finds expression in agonized cries for aid and protection. For a moment the danger is great ; saint and canopy incline dangerously and are in imminent peril of capsizing. A hundred pairs of hands come to the rescue ; all is quickly righted ; the saint is restored to his position on the shoulders of the faithful. But to the woman whose welfare depended on the favourable descent of San Filippo, the catastrophe is dire, and, sobbing and disconsolate, she betakes herself to her home. Nor do the others fail to show their alarm. Old men shake their heads and think the event fully confirms their predictions of evil times ; the younger discuss the occurrence, and, after their kind, hope for the best though fearing the worst. The zest of the

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feſta appears to have departed as we wend our way to the town ; but not half an hour elapses before the ſpirits of the people revive and we find the ſtreets as full of animation as before. Great ſatisfaction is derived from a large balloon in the form of San Filippo ſeated in his chair with his legs dangling comically in the air, which, ſucceſsfully launched, quickly riſes and is carried by the wind towards the ſhrine above—an incident to be regarded with ſatisfaction as a ſign of the continued benevolence of the ſaint.

On entering the church, we find the ſaint ſafely houſed therein, ſeated in ſtate under the canopy before the high altar, brilliantly lighted with candles, receiving the adoration of the people. Men and women flock to him, and, on tiptoe, touch the hem of his garment with their fingers, which they reverently kiſs. Children are held up to do likewise. But by far the moſt remarkable event of the day is reached when the ſaint, being removed to a place of honour on the high altar itſelf, among the

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burning candles (where he is to remain for two days before returning to his church on the hill), the ceremony of exorcising the evil spirit of a woman commences. The unfortunate is solemnly conducted in procession to the canopy and installed in the seat vacated by the saint. Here she remains until the full ritual of invocation and prayer with admonition by book, bell, and candle, accompanied by incense and the sprinkling of holy water is gone through. The result attending the ceremony is not known. This, however, can be vouched for: the Evil One did not fly away through the window left open for the purpose, nor disappear in the form of a noxious reptile, as happened, we were told, on a similar occasion in a neighbouring church.

Fireworks, music and dancing, eating, drinking and singing follow long into the night and early morning. But for all that we do not wait, as dusk is at hand, and Calatabiano offers no good lodging for the night. So we drive once more over the plain of Alcantara,

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passing the desolate site of Greek Naxos on its promontory of black lava, through the long straggling street of Giardini, against which lap the blue waters of the sea in unceasing rhythm. And as we climb towards beautiful Taormina, Etna, losing the purple tints of sunset, is sharing with the waves the silver light of the moon.

**THE SPIRIT
OF THE “MAFIA”**

THE SPIRIT OF THE "MAFIA"

ALTHOUGH the national life of Italy has advanced by leaps and bounds, and each decade adds to its social well-being, some remarks on the scourge of the *Mafia*—what it was, and what its declining influence still is—may be read with interest.

If, as the American writer says, "No artist's work is so high, so noble, so enduring, so important for all time as the making of character in a child," the development of a nation must be a topic even more absorbing to the student of mankind. Thus it may fairly be asked, Is Italy recovering the importance of its past and becoming one of the great nations of the future?

By greatness is not meant the possession of a large army and fleet to give momentary

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importance in the direction of the world's affairs, but rather the endurance of a strong race founded on irresistibility of intent and moral backbone, with manliness to assert and maintain itself in its various undertakings and expansion.

It is a difficult question to answer. So large a subject offers many sides for consideration, necessitating special study and knowledge of the many peoples forming united Italy. It is scarcely within the limits of a chapter that the matter can be properly discussed.

But in the Italy of to-day a growing force has been arrayed against the progress of the country; one that still merits the attention of its well-wishers. This force comes from the south, and is best described as the Spirit of the *Mafia*.

In the welding together of the principalities and powers which resulted in the present Kingdom of Italy, it is doubtful whether Victor Emmanuel and the rest of that noble band of patriots rightly estimated the materials with

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which they intended to raise their fabric when once the grand idea of a united country had passed its fevered stage. They may not have altogether rightly gauged the true worth of the enthusiasm which then surrounded them, nor considered how much it was to be relied on in the future when the difficulties and sacrifices of union had become apparent. No matter. It was a heroic task they manfully carried out. To their successors have fallen the less grateful duty of consolidating the work, of raising the country to the height of supporting the penalties and removing the obstacles which, after half a century of life, attach to it still.

If the difference of race between the northern and the southern inhabitants be not so accentuated in Italy as between Austria and Hungary, nevertheless a great difference exists. This is shown by the modified respect with which the northerners speak of the southerners, and the manner in which the latter, especially the Sicilians, refer to the rest of

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their compatriots. In Sicily those who live on the farther side of the Straits of Messina are classed together as *continentali*—a term equally applicable to a Russian or a Dane as to a Tuscan or a Piedmontese. The people in the north are more advanced in civilization. The Lombard farmer is as a prince compared with his Calabrese brother; a Tuscan peasant may rightly look with pity upon his Sicilian counterpart.

The cultivation and refinement of the upper and middle classes of the north offer no less a field for comparison. Southern Italians have much to learn before being on a social equality with the rest of their country. This knowledge, felt but not admitted, which rankles in their minds, creating a certain discontent, is not unconnected with the title of this chapter.

The flow of civilization from upper Italy has met the opposing current of southern semi-mediævalism; the clear course of the one has been contaminated by the turbid stream of the other. The meeting of the waters is at Rome.

The Spirit of the *Mafia*

The *Mafia* is found throughout the whole of Sicily, although the provinces of Messina, Catania, and Syracuse are less affected. In Palermo, Trapani, and Girgenti it is seen at its worst. "In the Conca d'Oro (Palermo)," writes Senatore Villari, "the peasants are well-to-do, but they are *Mafiosi*, and commit a vast number of crimes. I would not believe it at first, as it seemed to be in contradiction to the rules of political economy and social science; but I saw it in a thousand ways, and in a thousand ways was it proved to me."

The changes wrought by new political influences offer freer field for the development of the *Mafia*. It was rife in the Bourbon times, according to a lurid account of the state of the island written by Del Caretto to the King of Naples in 1836. But in those days the strong hand of despotism held the evil in check. It has been left to modern sentimental legislation, which dresses up licence in the garb of liberty, to foster and favour the Spirit of the *Mafia* under the mask of freedom.

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“ *La Mafia* ” is no elaborate secret society with its written code of laws and solemn initiation into its mysteries. It has probably no list of members sworn to obey the orders of a chief, with periodical meetings of its followers in remote hiding-places to decree vengeance on its enemies. It is better defined as a sentiment of opposition to social and moral obligations, to legal restraint : in short, an extended conspiracy against the community on the part of individuals to oppose their will arbitrarily and violently on others.

It may not be so virulent a form of social disorder as the Neapolitan Camorra, but its essence is illicit intriguing for the sake of personal gain ; or, as has been aptly written, “ the aim of the Association is plunder and the sanction on which it relies is still death.”

The best that can be said of the *Mafia* is that it is the feeling which prompts a man to look exclusively after his own interests and profit, sacrificing those of others unscrupulously and unrelentingly in so doing.

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The workings of the organization are without limit, unseen, frequently unknown, unaccountable, but always present. Its work is to be traced in blackmailing as well as in brigandage, in falsifying electoral lists in order to extend the franchise to its followers, in rendering assistance to robbers in agricultural districts as well as to thieves in town.

Overseers and caretakers in the country, who take the place of the ever-absent landlord, have a tacit understanding, and thus form a compact body which the police are powerless to combat. *Mafiosi* are to be found also among smugglers and small proprietors. In the city they are seen nearly everywhere ; they are well dressed and friendly with the moneyed classes, although without visible means of livelihood. Many of them congregate in the ante-chambers of the prefectures, of senators and deputies, of those who occupy positions of power and profit. They are to be met with in theatres, where they applaud those who pay them and hiss those who do not pay : in fact, at every

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public resort where mischief can be done and profit made.

One of the principal and most lucrative occupations of *Mafiosi* is cattle-stealing, which is carried on largely. The members of the *Mafia* endeavour to obtain command of public funds as well as the money of charitable institutions, which they employ for their own purposes. The administration of justice offers opportunity for their machinations, and unjust sentences are often the result of their intriguing.

Mafiosi will not bid against their fellows at public auction; they combine to keep intending purchasers away by threats in order to acquire property at a low figure. They may count infallibly on assistance when called to account for their evil deeds. False witnesses are brought by the score; an alibi ably concocted, sometimes at great expense and labour, is pleaded and proved. Large sums are freely spent in hush money, documents are subtracted, and a trial results in acquittal.

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The knowledge that a man is a '*Mafioso*' is sufficient to free him from the attack of an enemy; the latter knows the means of defence of which the former can dispose, and fears to run the risk of being shot from behind a wall, a favourite argument of the *Mafiosi* when discussing the question of right and wrong.

One of the principal safeguards of the *Mafia* is the conspiracy of silence, called *Omertà*. When a murder be committed by a *Mafioso*, the friends of the victim and murderer alike, even if unknown to each other, are at enmity, are united by one idea—that of saving the assassin from the rigour of the law. They will not speak. They say to themselves, "The dead is gone, we must help the living;" not from charitable motives, but because they will not side with the law.

The *Mafioso*, relying upon no force but his own, suffers an injury; but he rarely applies to the law for redress. To him justice comes by personal effort. He may be wounded in

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a fight, or attempt at murder. He does not speak, nor apparently see, nor feel. He is taken to the hospital and listens with seeming impassiveness to the doctor's verdict saying he has only a short time to live ; but he does not give the name of his aggressor. " Si moru mi voricu ; si campu t'allampu ! " (" If I die, they'll bury me ; if I live, I'll strike you dead ! ") is his thought ; although in most cases the legacy of vengeance, sometimes even by will, is left to relations.

Omertà is also the art of lying raised to a science for the purpose of putting the police off the track of criminals. But this sublimation of mendacity is not confined to the *Mafioso* alone ; many classes are involved in it. Those who are called as witnesses in law-courts frequently lie because others lie ; or it is their habitual practice ; or they wish to put the authorities on the wrong track for the devilry of the thing ; or, again, through fear. In such cases the upper classes lie through a false sense of generosity, to avoid recrimination and

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retaliation ; and it is curious to note in connection with this, that there appears to be little shame in so doing.

But, on the other hand, it is to be remarked to those who would see the beam in the Sicilian brother's eye, that such mendacity, however reprehensible it may be, is not to be wondered at so greatly when it be considered that telling the truth in court is often followed by a knife in the ribs or a bullet in the head. A poor woman, deprived of her only son by the assassin's blade, who refuses to give evidence for fear of not acting up to the traditions of her race and in terror of the consequences, is not so much to blame as is the state of a country allowing so great a depth of degradation, or an administration of the law failing to hold her harmless for assisting it.

Many crimes are openly committed without the Government being aware of the authors. " Every one knows where they are, who they are, what they do, and what likely to do, except the authorities themselves, for there is no one

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to denounce them, nor bear witness against them. If by chance the Government, by great exertion and trouble, succeeds in obtaining traces of the author of a crime, the case fails when brought into court because witnesses deny what they have stated before, and even the accuser retracts his indictment." So wrote Signori Franchetti and Sonnino a quarter of a century ago, and conditions have not greatly altered in places where the *Mafia* is found.

Count Codronchi, who was High Commissioner in Sicily, spoke thus of the *Mafia*: "It exercises its influence on all in Sicily; all fear it; and in order to secure their property and persons, people are compelled to have recourse to miserable expedients. Thus head *Mafiosi* are frequently employed as guards and caretakers; and if any difficulty or disturbance occur among the workmen, their presence is sufficient to check it at once. I will give an example. In a great city of Sicily, the civic dues gave a return much below

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the right amount, owing to smuggling. The *Mafiosi* were charged to see to it, with the result that the right amount was secured. The *Mafia*," continued the same authority, "is most powerful and deep-rooted in the island; its power knows no obstacles, not even at the hands of the Government. Read the description of the *bravi* in the 'Promessi Sposi,' and you will have a slight idea of the *Mafia*."

As given by a Police Commissary, a description of the state of an inland town near Palermo, residence of a Member of Parliament and of another man, who were arrested, one on the charge of complicity in, and the other as being the perpetrator of the murder of a well-known public functionary in 1893, may be quoted as an instructive example of the nefarious doings of the *Mafia*. "On taking up my appointment," he said, "I found in the town a state of affairs rendered horrible by the doings of the worst kind of *Mafiosi* that Sicily can produce. There was, in fact,

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a band of ruffians who held supreme rule over all men and all matters in the place. My predecessor told me that he had collected evidence of the existence of an association of malefactors, among whom were members of the town council. I arrested many of the suspected individuals, including the town councillors. I did my duty; but I also drew upon me the abuse of all the *Mafiosi*, who did not fail to threaten me. To master the *Mafia* it was necessary to dissolve the council, and I sent in a report of the antecedents of its members, forming a long list of accusations of fraud, robbery with violence, thefts, etc., which had been made against them. An influential friend protected them, and the ultimate result of my work was only the suspension of the council's secretary."

No less remarkable was the admission of General Mirri, afterwards Minister for War, who was in command in Sicily in 1894. "The *Mafia* is composed of a swarm of ruffians, who dishonour a beautiful island, who

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suck its life-blood, and debase it at the expense of the honest inhabitants.

Mafiosi have means of communication of their own, as thieves have in London. These, though differing in some ways from the ordinary prison slang, are chiefly used to enable members to converse freely when in prison. The jargon is distinguished more by the pronunciation than by any extended vocabulary. Founded on the Palmeritan dialect, itself an exaggeration of the Neapolitan, it is recognized by a hoarse guttural enunciation, which has spread wherever *Mafiosi* are found in numbers. It finds expression also in new meanings to certain words. For example may be quoted: "*sirinata*" (*serenata*=an evening's entertainment), meaning "a drawing of knives"; "*aughi*" (*aghi*=needles), "knives"; "*mulettu*" (*muletto*=a small mule), "a long knife"; "*cantare*." (=to sing), "to betray"; "*ballare*" (=to dance), "to fight"; "*sarvatevi u cuteddu*" (*conservate il coltello*=keep the knife sheathed),

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“ discuss the matter calmly ” ; “ *abbajare* ” (= to bark), “ to betray ” ; “ *a siritina non è serena* ” (*la sera non è tranquilla* = the night is disturbed), “ there is something amiss ” ; “ *u capillanu è d'invitati* ” (*il capellano è tra gl'invitati* = the priest is among the guests), “ blood is to be spilt since the confessor has been bidden ” ; “ *u statau* ” (*lo spense* = he blew out the candle), “ he killed him.”

There is also the alphabet, or cypher, of the *Mafia*, which is as follows, viz. :—

<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>l</i>	<i>m</i>
ƒ	÷	8	ð	⌘	⌘			.	ſ	ω
<i>n</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>q</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>v</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>z</i>
v	⊙	l	⌞	⌚	∞	+	⊥	∧	---	90

By this *Mafiosi* communicate with those under arrest, not so much as a means of defence or of escaping punishment, as to denounce, or give warning of, half-hearted or untrust-

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worthy associates who may be met with in prison.

The word *Mafia* in its present interpretation is of recent birth. It was formerly used to define the bearing of a pert, or, in the language of schoolboys, a cocky, individual, just as *Camorra*, denoting the powerful Neapolitan criminal association, was formerly restricted to describe the plotting that goes on inside Neapolitan prison walls. To seek for the origin of "*La Mafia*," is to go back to the farther periods of the history of Sicily, for it springs from the natural temperament of the people, which has been formed by their many vicissitudes and strivings. The Sicani, or Siculi, were swallowed up by the Greeks, the Carthaginians, and the Romans; and they in their turn were succeeded by the Arabs, the Saracens, and the Normans. Then the Teuton, the French, the Spanish, and even the British, came upon the scene, so that the Sicilian of to-day—since his home has ever been a bone of contention, and in consequence

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a battlefield of the world, may be said to be the child of all nations.

Professor Giorgio Arcoleo thus describes the Sicilian character in his able monograph on Sicily :—

“ In nations, as in individuals, there are always some prominent and permanent traits, and in the Sicilian I see the worship of brute force, the spirit of domination in ideas, in human affections and in life generally, with the glorification of self ; also pessimism, and the instinct to generalize according to the limitations of the individual and to distort things of daily life as private fancy may dictate. I discern the desire to rebel and to induce others to do so, and an inability of association for a given good purpose. In addition, there is a tendency towards melancholy, self-isolation, and over-susceptibility. . . . The worship of brute force is derived from his surroundings, that is to say, from nature, and from the legends and history of his country. He is impelled thereto by the fiery outbursts

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of his volcano, by the earthquake which swallows up towns and cities, by the burning sky of bronze that withholds rain for twelve months consecutively, by the endless rolling expanse of his cultivated lands. He is influenced by the African scirocco, which stifles breath, action, and even the power of thought ; by the rapid and exuberant growth of vegetation, and by the deep and inexhaustible mines. That worship of the monstrous is also induced when he thinks of the forging of Jove's thunderbolts, of the Cyclops and giants who were his forefathers, of the murderous Scylla and Charybdis, of the eternal fecundity of the earth as symbolized by Ceres, and of the violence of the elements as described by Æolus. . . . Servitude, invasion, and strife have deprived the Sicilian of stability of character ; feudalism has penetrated into all grades of society, and even into home life. From all this have arisen disquiet, discontent, conspiracy, with revenge carried to extremes in moments of triumph. Thence springs a disproportionate sense of his

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own importance, which sometimes becomes grotesque."

The *Mafia* is "bred in the bone," Signor Villari says; it lends itself to the Sicilian temperament, as it allows him to assert his overweening individualism, which is one of his principal characteristics. The saying of Massimo d'Azeglio, that there is "some instinct of civil war in the heart of every Italian," may be supplemented by the statement that conspiracy and intrigue are condoned by the many. Even when a man does not join the secret societies of oaths, bloodshed and midnight meetings, he will not disdain to secure advantage by "binding himself with others whose combined operations often perplex a Government."

Secret societies have flourished in Italy from ancient times. The Roman Senate had to fight them, and by them it was frequently baffled. Roman citizens formed clubs and associations, which the Curia found it hard to oppose. And in mediæval times, the guilds and companies

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were directed to protect the interests of their members against the common laws.

The reason of the prevalence of the *Mafia* may be sought in a variety of causes. Its principal one is the latent corruption. People are convinced that justice is for the powerful. They have no faith in the law, which they regard as their natural enemy. “La furca è per lu poviru, la guistizea pri lu fissu” (The gallows for the poor man ; the law courts for the fool) is one of their pithy sayings. The hope of litigants is centred on favouritism and intrigue, and herein lies the influence of the *Mafia*, and the despicable power of some in authority, who traffic in the unsavoury bartering of their country's justice. It is not that money always passes between the parties ; but there is invariably the *quid pro quo*, and nothing is given to him who does not pay. Signor Colajanni, an outspoken Socialist deputy, has much to say on this subject in his instructive work, “Il Regno della Mafia.” He writes :—

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“ In Sicily we have arrived at this point—the most honest and scrupulous people invoke the protection and intervention of deputies in their affairs, because they are sincerely convinced that their adversaries will call in the assistance of influential persons to their prejudice. There is no belief in the fair conduct of public matters ; nor, above all, in the impartiality and honesty of the judges and their decisions ; all is subordinate, and all is settled by the influence of the member of parliament. Thus, in general, and I defy my colleagues to controvert the statement, the prestige of a deputy does not depend on his intellectual qualities, his rectitude of conduct, or his patriotism, but on the influence—I use that word in preference to the less polite term of *Mafia*—which he brings to bear.”

“ Some deputies always vote for the Government, no matter what it may be,” reports Signor Villari, “ and the Government concedes them whatever they may choose to ask.”

In the misery and ignorance of the masses,

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the *Mafia* finds a ready soil adapted to its growth. Though the condition of the peasant has been frequently written of—and that his condition is miserable if we compare him to his fellows in other countries, or set up for him a special standard of happiness and comfort, according to our own lights, may be true—yet his wants are so few, his knowledge of the amenities of life so scanty, and he is moreover so favoured by the splendid climate and wonderful fertility of the soil, that, if the overpowering weight of taxation were modified and justice secured to him, he would be both law-abiding and prosperous. As things are, he is a slave to whom liberty is a sham and prosperity a farce. Before the bureaucratic tyrants to be found in every town, and before the *Mafia*, unless he belong to it himself, he has to bow to the ground and put up with the injustice that may be meted out to him. The depredatory deeds of the barons of the Middle Ages are as common in Sicily as ever they were, only they are done by other and lower

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hands and fill other and baser pockets. What was claimed by the strong hand of might then, is now secured by the subtle means of intrigue and venality. In fact, the state of the south is scarcely prepared for liberal legislation, because the men who exercise the power are unfit for the authority with which they find themselves invested, and the majority of the people are unprepared to reap the benefit of a freedom which in consequence degenerates into licence.

Innumerable are the examples of the operations of the *Mafia* that also might be quoted. At a notable trial at Milan and Bologna "the miserable tale was told in court of police officials in fear of, or in apparent league with, the *Mafia*, openly impeding the course of justice by the suppression of evidence, with their colleagues either guiltily acquiescent or impotent to prevent it; of professional men and others of high social position figuring as cowardly withholders of facts to which they had previously sworn; of mendacious asser-

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tions only corrected on threat of arrest ; of grown-up men driven to tears for terror of the consequences of telling the truth ; of witnesses openly approached and threatened in the ante-rooms of the court itself ; of the betrayal of private and confidential official reports ; of important documents abstracted from the volume of the process ; of a captain and non-commissioned officers of that part of the army responsible for the maintenance of public order being admonished and threatened with imprisonment by the Court for contradictory evidence and grave omission of duty." One false witness is reported to have said : " To-day I go to prison, or I shall be killed by the *Mafia* ; the truth I will not tell. I prefer prison to death."

Signor De Felice quotes the following tales : " There was at Palermo a well-known and dangerous scoundrel, and head of the *Mafia*. The quæstor sent for him and offered him a post in the police, which was refused. ' I give you a week to reflect ; choose between

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my offer and penal servitude,' said the official. But the man selected another way out of the difficulty. He waited for the official and stabbed him in the principal square of the city. A horse was stolen from a certain baron. By help of the *Mafia*, a noted brigand (who was being actively sought for by the military at the time) was brought to his house. 'Baron,' said he, 'if the mare be alive, you shall have it: if not, I promise you you shall have its skin.' The owner had to be content with the skin. Application to the *Mafia* for restitution of stolen property is more efficacious than going to the police."

Signor Tajani related that at another town six of the most disreputable *Mafiosi* were made respectively commander of the rural police, head of the urban guards, and captains in the National Guards; and nearly all the crimes which happened in the neighbourhood were perpetrated with their permission or knowledge. One day a police magistrate received a noted *Mafioso* with marked deference. After

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his visitor had gone, he said, "See to what degradation I am reduced! That man deserves the handcuffs, and I would willingly take him off to prison myself."

The real remedy for the curse of the *Mafia* lies in a rigid administration of justice. If judges and other law officials of all grades were held severely responsible for the performance of their duty, and inexorably punished when failing to do it, the principal field of operation and illicit enterprise of the *Mafiosi* would no longer exist. Italy does not suffer from want of laws; on the contrary, it has too many already. Men of sufficient courage to be honest, and of sufficient honesty to be courageous, are wanted. The air is full of wrong-doing, generated by weak measures to repress it, and by the connivance, tacit or otherwise, which it finds on all sides. It would be well to bring home to magistrates and police officials the fact that they are not, and cannot be, above the laws.

Much might be done if the well-to-do

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classes, who have a greater stake in the prosperity of the country, would combine to impel public sentiment in the right direction. Much might be expected from the intelligent and generously-minded youths of Italy in patriotic league to uphold the institutions of their land, and rescue them from the hands of adventurers who are playing sad havoc with them. Crime could be sensibly diminished by causing all to be punished, if accessory, either before or after the fact of an illegal action, for it would deal an irreparable blow at that same *Omertà*, or conspiracy of silence, which now defeats justice at every turn. There should be severest punishment for speculation, that the taxes might reach the Exchequer intact ; and the Government should look carefully to the choice of its representatives whom it sends to Sicily, as indeed should the Sicilians themselves to those whom they send to represent them at Rome.

It has been said that all Sicily is a hotbed of the *Mafia*, and that its inhabitants are all more or less in league with it. Nothing could

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be a greater libel on the Sicilian character. If the *Mafia* has been permitted to obtain a great ascendancy, it is largely owing to the inveterate habit of southerners to avoid responsibility and take things easily. Carried away by the events of to-day, a Sicilian too readily dismisses from his mind the importance and the logical outcome of what has happened yesterday. These faults, combined with a lack of moral backbone and want of solidarity in co-operating for the public weal, notably help in the development of that which must be called the crime of the *Mafia*, since it is truly sucking the life-blood and suffocating the growth of the people.

Sicilians have many of the qualities requisite for the formation of a strong race. They possess energy, fortitude, extraordinary intelligence, with patience, and long-suffering. They are, moreover, warm-hearted, industrious, frugal, with polished manners, and sober. There are among them, as among the magistrates, men of the highest principles and attainments, who recognize and deplore the

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state of the country ; but they are powerless to combat it successfully for want of union. Sicilians, as has been rightly said, are athirst for justice, and would be the first to hail it joyfully, if it came to them.

It is an anomaly that a land second to none in beauty, and a soil inferior to no other in fertility, with its genial climate and blue skies all making for prosperity and happiness, should yet be the home of crime. There need be little hesitation in repeating that if the administration of the law were to be confided to men of undoubted integrity and courage ; if, in fact, latent corruption and intrigue were inexorably dealt with, the island would advance by leaps and bounds, and the *Mafia* would die a natural death, not only to the advancement of Sicily, but to that of the Kingdom of Italy generally.

Thus the noble work of Victor Emmanuel, Cavour, Manin, and other great patriots of a redeemed Italy, would be strengthened ; and the country would continue its sure course of progress and enlightenment upon which it has embarked, without undue let or hindrance.

CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS

NOT with yule-log and mistletoe, nor with boar's head and mincemeat, is Christmas celebrated in Sicily. Neither are frost and snow companions of the season which calls for merrymaking and rejoicing. If warmth and good cheer be provided, as indeed they are provided, the one takes a more natural and the other a more homely form.

Christmas Day has its important place among *feste* of the holiday-loving Sicilian. Whether its origin was a wish to celebrate the Nativity only, or whether, conjointly also, it be a successor of the Saturnalia of a remoter period, it is hardly worth while to consider here. It is sufficient to note in passing that the descendants of the Romans rejoice to-day at the same time of year, and, in some

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manner, with similarity in their way of rejoicing. In the interchange of gifts and closing of schools; in the kindling of fires and lighting of candles; in gambling and feasting, together with relaxation in the distinctions of social standing and general merry-making, the doings of ancient Rome at the end of the year find more marked repetition in modern Sicily than elsewhere in Christendom.

The season is one of family reunion and social gathering, of exchange of compliments. Members of families travel long distances to meet at the Christmas dinner. Here are dishes which especially mark the season. Fried eels are generally found on the bills of fare of those who can afford the luxury; no house is without its dish of home-made macaroni; and the large tarts of candied fruits and cream, called *cassate*, take the place of the English plum puddings.

On Christmas Eve the countryside is depopulated; people flock to the towns. In

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many homes, as in the churches, are seen minute representations of the holy stable of Bethlehem, called *presepii*, and before them perform the *ceremellarj*, or players on the melodious Sicilian bagpipe. These musicians—and many are skilled players—also parade the streets, filling the air with melodies (a favourite one is that from which Handel took the theme of his Pastoral Symphony in the “Messiah”) that the hillsides and huts of the shepherds have known from remote ages.

Toward midnight the churches are filled with expectant worshippers awaiting “the birth of the *Bambino*.” If the priests, with the disregard of punctuality which is a feature of Sicilian life, keep their congregation waiting for the mass, time is beguiled by admiring the festal arrangement of the high altar with its hundreds of wax candles, gifts of the faithful, as well as by devotional exercises. Here is then heard from the organ in various forms and modulations that beautiful old-time music of a southern Christmas, the *Pastorale*, or Song

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of the Shepherds, of which, for its alluring melody, the listener never wearies, despite its continuous repetitions.

When mass is over—and it is not a short ceremony—the image of the Infant Christ is reverently taken from its place on the altar, consigned to the hands of the officiating priest, and by him carried in procession, first round the building, and then under a *baldacchino* to the streets, where, accompanied by the congregation, and by those who have waited patiently by the fires lighted in the open squares, many of the men carrying torches, it makes solemn procession amid respectful crowds from church to church. Bells ring, *mortarette* are fired, rockets are sent up. And when the *Bambino* has been seen, and His birth vouched for, good wishes pass from mouth to mouth ; and, as in the East, the hope is here expressed that every one may live to see a “ thousand of such days.”

A blue sky, a soft breeze, and a genial warmth are the usual features of the Sicilian

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Christmas. To the simple-minded folk a day of sunlit beauty seems fitted to the joy of thanksgiving which they, in their homely realism, believe to have counterpart in the heaven above them. "A most serene day for the *Bambino* to amuse Himself in Paradise!" exclaimed a poor countrywoman in all reverence. She believed that the Child-God of the shrines, nursed on the Madonna's lap, was enjoying the sunshine of the day, as she also was enjoying it.

The superstitions of a people to whom their religion is yet but half-explained, not understood, and therefore wholly a mystery, are certainly not wanting. But instances of a steadfast faith and confidence in a higher destiny are seen among the poorest, and might put to shame others better educated and professing to lead a better life than these poor peasants. What could be more significant of that faith than to see the country folk at the end of a hard day's toil, without the tolling of bell or bidding of priest, assemble nightly

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during the *novena*, or the nine days before Christmas, to pray for blessings they have most at heart, or to give thanks for those received.

It was a notable scene one evening after dusk to look upon such a group of *contadini*. In a large Gothic church among the mountains a handful of men and women were kneeling before an altar decked with evergreens, rosemary, and oranges. They were of the very poorest. The interior of the church was almost in darkness. The east end alone was dimly lighted from the altar by a few tapers before the picture of Santa Maria di Maniace.

This far-famed portrait of the Virgin Mother had been brought nine centuries ago from far-off Byzantium. For it the good Queen Margaret, assured of the sanctity of its origin, had caused a smaller chapel of the castle stronghold of that intrepid warrior, George Maniaces, to be replaced by the larger church. And for the greater honouring of the picture, painted as a work of love and adoration by the hand of the holy artist, St. Luke—as all

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the countryside knows with pride and satisfaction—the Queen of Sicily placed monks in charge to guard and daily pray to their precious portrait of the Queen of Heaven. The monks have departed long since. But the picture, greatly venerated for the miracles it has wrought, remains, and with the serene face of the Madonna, which looked down on her suppliants from its richly gilded background and frame, was the object to which all eyes were directed, all hearts uplifted.

The nearer lofty columns ; the remoter arches stretching grey arms of masonry until lost in the gloom of the timbered roof ; the long shadows of the worshippers on wall and floor ; the old-time music in the minor key (perhaps the only innate note of sadness in the Sicilian character) ; the voices of the men and women in melodious and sustained chords, made of this act of devotion a scene both impressive and attractive.

As the chant rose and fell in the pathetic litany of the Virgin, the question irresistibly

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suggested itself: Was this religious fervour, a seeking for the guiding hand of truth? Or was it but a superstitious fear of evil to come from its omission, for all that it seemed primitive and sincere, a step onward, and possibly upward? The answer came when at the conclusion of the litany two young men rose from the others, and, advancing towards the picture of the Madonna, clasped hands in silence while looking steadfastly into each other's eyes.

A short time previously, at nightfall, news had come from the mountains that a man had been stabbed by a companion in dispute. A doctor was not to be procured, or at soonest not until the following day, because none was nearer than in the town many miles away; and it was unlikely, besides, that he should leave his comfortable home to attend a poor unknown peasant, especially when to travel on the bad roads of a mountainous country in bad weather seemed to offer so valid an excuse for his absence. But to others not so remote the call for help was different. Little time was

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lost in collecting things likely to be useful to the wounded man, not forgetting also the author of the mischief, on whose account a pair of handcuffs was added to the lint, bandages, and other remedies hastily thrust into a bag.

On arriving at the place of the affray it was at once known that the assailant had escaped to the forests for greater safety. There was nothing to divert attention from the sufferer. To those unacquainted with the life of rural Sicily, a detailed description of the manner in which the peasants, and even the well-to-do farmers, live, would be unintelligible. What wonder, then, that the wounded youth was found in a miserable hut of four bare walls, windowless, and with a low roof through which the smoke of a scanty open fire found its usual exit !

Expelling the brown-faced peasants, who crowded round the rough bed with the awe-struck look men have when waiting in uncertainty for bad news, the wound was dressed

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as well as could be. Because the injury appeared to be of a serious nature, it was thought right to take from the mouth of the sufferer an account of the affair.

The scene here presented was one in which the Dutch painters would have delighted. In a corner of the hut, where the smoke-blackened walls and rafters were dimly visible in the flickering light of the fire and a small oil lamp, lay the peasant lad on a mattress supported by boards. Around were several rural guards in uniform, their weapons flashing fitfully, one stooping, lamp in hand, to give light to him who wrote, while another supported the head of the sufferer on his arm. Some poultry were huddled in a corner of the mud floor. At the half-open door was the grey head of the young fellow's father, now reassured by cheering words, but with anxiety still in his eyes. Beyond him in the darkness without were swarthy faces. A kitten played with a bandage fallen to the floor.

The wounded lad spoke with difficulty and

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with reluctance ; no Sicilian will willingly accuse an assailant, reserving to himself the right to strike and avenge an injury. But this much was elicited : An argument, a dispute, then heated words, between him, Nino by name, and a companion, Salvatore, followed by a swift stab with a knife, and a wound perilously near a vital spot. The tale is a common one in Sicily.

But prompt aid served to avert evil consequences to the wounded body ; and the later intervention of friends in the name of the Madonna to patch up the quarrel, which otherwise would have had further consequences.

And thus on Christmas Eve Nino was seen standing before the picture of Santa Maria di Maniace, his hand clasped in that of Salvatore, vowing before the Holy Mother that he bore no malice in his heart, as Salvatore, claiming forgiveness, swore renewed devotion to his friend. No words were spoken. The Madonna could not exact from such proud

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youths more than this tacit act of complete reconciliation.

The tapers on the altar were extinguished. The worshippers left the church and dispersed to their homes, Nino and Salvatore arm in arm.

**“UNBRIDLED
FLOODS
OF FIRE”**

“UNBRIDLED FLOODS OF FIRE

SICILY has been sorely tried latterly by Nature, which usually treats her with tender care. Her orange and lemon groves, her oliveyards and vineyards, her cotton and rice-fields, with superabundant crops of cereals and vegetables, her orchards, and her wealth of wild flowers, speak of Nature's beneficence throughout the year. But times come when its benevolence turns to anger and it scourges where before it had blessed, and that which is usually gathered in abundance it destroys in rage and fury.

It seems but yesterday, that such evil days came to the eastern coast of Sicily. Torrential floods, which carried away houses and lands, causing sides of mountains to slide into the valleys, were followed shortly by the ever-

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memorable earthquake at Messina and Calabria and tidal wave which killed uncounted thousands of people and destroyed within half a minute cities, towns, and villages as if they had been habitations built of sand. Fire has been added to those terrors of water and earth ; and this, perhaps, is more to be dreaded than either of the other two, since it is more horrible and insistent, the terror of it more enduring.

Until the early morning of March 23, 1910, that vast southern slope of Etna which stretches from the wooded zone to the shore of the Ionian Sea, was smiling and prosperous, with full promise of abundant harvests. Young leaves of shining green were on the vines ; beans were in flower, filling the air with fragrance ; cherry and apple-trees were bursting into blossom to rival the white flowers which had but recently fallen from the almond-trees. Peasants—men, women, and children—were at work in the fields, hoeing the young corn or digging the vineyards, laughing and singing as is their wont during

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their labour. The sun shone brilliantly from a blue sky. All was peace. There was nothing to denote the coming catastrophe to those fertile lands.

The change came as a thunderclap to turn promise into disappointment, profit into loss, and happiness and content into woeful apprehension and dismay. The earth shook violently, thirty shocks succeeding one another rapidly ; and then “ the Mountain ” burst forth. “ *La Montagna si scassó !* ” was the universal cry of alarm.¹ Yes, the Mountain had broken out ; high on its slopes, it is true, but at different points, with a roar that could be heard, and immense columns of vapour and ashes which could be seen at a distance of many miles.

Knowledge that a volcano is in a state of eruption is, of course, a cause of serious alarm to all who dwell in its vicinity until the outburst be located. Then apprehension is more

¹ Etna is called “ *la Montagna* ” by those who live on it ; it is scarcely known by any other name.

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or less centred; although, be it remarked, when craters have opened on one side other mouths frequently appear in other places. Etna, indeed, has been often in eruption at different points at the same time.

The scene of this outbreak is about three thousand feet below the summit of the mountain, westward of the so-called Montagnuola, that great spur or shoulder of Etna which adds so greatly to its grandeur of form. The craters, some eight or ten in number, which lie almost in a straight line, are in that region which has been more volcanically active latterly. Though all the craters emit vapour, one only has ejected lava. This has been named Monte Ricc6, in fit recognition of the services to science of the well-known volcanologist, the Director of the Observatories of Catania and Etna.

The outbreak was not accompanied by the electric storms which frequently herald an eruption. For some years past the dense masses of vapour and ashes pouring from the

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Great Crater at short intervals denoted unusual activity. But minor eruptions which have occurred within the last few years had led to the hope that a great outburst might not be feared. The showers of ashes and scorïæ did little damage, as they fell on the *regione deserta*, or the uncultivated zone. Destruction came from the streams of lava only. These, ejected from one mouth and flowing several miles through stony wastes, entered first the *regione selvosa*, or wooded slopes, descending to the *regione coltivata*, where the vineyards producing the celebrated wines of the Bosco are situated. Here the devastation was great, the damage very grave.

The day we visited the scene of the eruption was the thirteenth since its commencement. Our road from Nicolosi, the oft-threatened town which stands two thousand feet above the sea, whence we rode on mules, lay through a desert of loose black sand, where a few spare vines and fewer trees eked out a difficult existence. Then, leaving on our right the white shrine

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with its inscription over the portal, "Divæ Agathæ Servatrici," which records the gratitude of the inhabitants for the miracle performed by the image of St. Agatha, the virgin martyr of Catania, in preserving the town from destruction, we stumbled over a horrible track of black stones on the lava stream of 1886. Up that track the mules laboured for two or three hours, passing the lava of 1892 to yet another expanse of sand.

But no longer was this a desert. The result of a very ancient eruption, the *débris* of the mountain had become soil of a rich brown colour; and innumerable cherry and apple-trees, with chestnut groves, flourished thereon exceedingly. Young crops of barley and rye made the ground green below them. Birds sang merrily among the branches. It was a little world of pink blossom and budding leaves among towering cliffs and extinct craters. It was an oasis in the midst of a forbidding desert of black crags and frowning mountains—a place typical of the joy of

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living, but where death and annihilation were very near at hand. As an enthusiastic traveller wrote many years ago : “ No language can do justice to the fertility, scenery, and luxuriant verdure of this tract, whose bosom, heated by subterranean fires, and situated in the most favourable climate upon earth, teems with every flower and tree that can delight the eye and every fruit that can gratify the palate ; fields covered with golden grain or the purple vine ; villages and convents embosomed in thick groves of chestnuts or oriental planes ; mossy fountains and transparent streams ; exhausted craters covered with a verdant canopy of foliage, invite the traveller to these enchanted scenes.”

The smell of sulphur and gases was carried on the wind, and soon were heard the rumble and rattle of falling stones and rocks. We came suddenly upon the head of the lava stream, which had flowed from the crater some ten miles away, four thousand feet above. During a few preceding days of diminished

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volcanic activity the molten stone had become more solid and its movements more sluggish. It was consequently grey on the surface. But as the sides were opened by almost incessant explosions within, the red-hot interior was visible. Large rocks, shattered by the heat below, fell down the slopes in fiery fragments. From a spot immediately in front of the advancing mass we looked into the red fissures and warmed ourselves in the glow which came from them.

Our course was by the side of the stream of lava, the progress of which became more rapid as we mounted. Lava destroys by direct downward course, and, more, by lateral expansion. The latter is caused by the molten stone which, arrested higher up, has cooled lower down. This causes it to rise in height and to form steep slopes on which fiery rocks and scorix roll from top to bottom, burning and burying trees and crops and whatever they find below. Minor streams, also, detach themselves on ground favourable and

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frequently unite again, filling up the intervening spaces. This occurred before our eyes. The usual road had been between the big flow of lava and the advancing head of a smaller current. Had we kept to the path to venture through the apparently safe opening, we should have been entrapped, and destruction would have been inevitable, because, if the two courses had joined, as join they did very shortly, no foot could have trodden the surface in the effort to escape from the advancing fire.

Late in the afternoon we reached the Casa Cantoniera, a hut of two rooms and a stable built by the Italian Alpine Club at an elevation of 7,500 feet above sea-level. Here we dismounted to leave our mules and walk towards the crater, some four hundred yards distant, a conical hill with a depressed summit. The side towards us was split almost to the base. Through that we looked, to see a devil's punch-bowl of molten stone, a turmoil of flame and masses of lurid vapour with a river of fire running from it. The

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wind blew the vapour towards us, and it was difficult to approach. We reached, however, a spot within two hundred yards of the mouth. There the guide refused to accompany us farther, pointing to rocks and stones ejected that morning.

We returned to the Casa Cantoniera, and, seated on the rocks in full view of the crater, waited for the night to come. A scanty meal in the hut followed. On going out of the building, we found the scene had changed as if by magic. The day throughout had been one of spring, with a cloudless sky. The sunset was a pervading glory of crimson, of gold and orange in the West, with fainter tints of similar colouring above. The dense masses of vapour which poured from the crater were of a lurid grey, but, when risen to the brink, borrowed the colours of sunset and took a brilliant cherry hue. These rolled away on the wind in fantastic curves and shapes. When the brighter tints had faded, the sky became of a brilliant translucent

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blue faintly tinged with olive-green, forming a background of marvellous contrast with the lurid vapour, such as no pen could adequately describe nor brush depict.

Then wonder succeeded wonder.

When the dusk had come—and it came rapidly—the west, the dome above us, and the mists eastward, were of flame-colour. The principal crater was the centre of interest. The incessant uproar which came from it was like the discharge of small guns. A deeper rumbling as of big cannon came from the other craters occasionally seen on the higher ridge, and from the ground below.

We climbed to the spot where we had been in the afternoon, although the sulphurous fumes and gases were now almost unbearable. We looked upon an immense fountain of flame darting flashing tongues amid red smoke, and casting volcanic bombs to a great height, which fell either into the crater again or to the earth about us. The world of living flame within the cone was of dazzling brilliance, and

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as bright was also the river of red-hot lava which flowed from the base of the rent. This cataract of viscous and incandescent stone flowed at an angle of about thirty degrees at the rate of ten to fifteen miles an hour. It was nearly forty yards wide, and was confined by a cliff of lava on either side. We stood on the edge of the cliff fifteen feet above and within ten yards of the edge of the stream. But for the keen wind the heat and gases would have suffocated us. Again, it would be difficult to convey the impression made by that lurid, silent, rapid current of red-hot molten stone. Its smooth, snake-like movement, its awful glare, its scorching heat, its irresistible force, its inexhaustible quantity—it had been flowing thus for a fortnight—were photographed on the mind, but the scene baffles description.

Farther down the valley, flooded by the molten stone, this river of fire assumed another aspect. Some of the rocks carried on its surface had lost their glow, and their surface had

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darkened. Seen from afar, this caused the stream to appear as a lurid serpent of immense size, spotted on its back, whose head was lost in the distance, whose tail had not yet emerged from its lair. At places the breadth of the stream was greater, and far away much of the incandescence had paled. But it was all of fire ; and we knew that if its skin was partially blackened by exposure to the air, there was the living furnace below. In fact, the scene was an orgie of flame and consuming heat, around, above, and below—one given over to the god of fire who therein reigned supremely. It was awe-inspiring, terrifying, horrible ; in which was felt the utter nothingness of man, powerless before its consuming forces, powerless to withstand, powerless even to comprehend.

As we turned away from that semblance of Hades, we followed the river of flame, to see many variations of destruction. At one spot was perhaps as strange a sight as any we had witnessed. On passing in the morning we had

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noticed a small conical hill—an extinct crater—at whose base the lava flowed. Now the stream had been dammed and piled itself behind, to pour in cascades of fire from the summit to the base ; and not in one, but in three separate falls which formed two arches of perfect but different shapes standing in a sea of flame. Thence the sinuous fiery serpent again glided rapidly far down the valley, where, cooling somewhat, the surface resembled an immensely long town with streets and houses brilliantly illuminated. Red-hot masses of rock continually rolled down the slopes, setting fire to vegetation, and the current of molten stone silently yet relentlessly sent out small branches to surround fruit and chestnut-trees, which, quivering and crackling for a moment, burst into flame, to topple over with a crash.

Long after leaving the lava stream, the pathway was illumined by the brilliant brightness of the new crater and the triple cascade of fire.

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When compared with the great outbursts of former years, this now written of does not rank highly. Some of the others may be recalled. Though the earliest are older than the glacial period in central and northern Europe, the first to be recorded happened probably in the seventh century B.C. This was followed by another in the time of Pythagoras ; and by that in 476 B.C., mentioned by Æschylus and Thucydides and referred to by Pindar in his Pythian Ode, when he wrote of “ snowy Etna, the pillar of Heaven, the nurse of sharp eternal snow, whereout pure springs of unapproachable fire are vomited from the inmost depths : in the day time the lava streams pour forth a lurid rush of smoke, but in the darkness a red rolling flame sweepeth rocks with uproar to the wide deep sea.”

In 396 B.C. a torrent of lava ran down the eastern side a distance of twenty-four miles to the sea, which it entered with a breadth of two miles, forcing Hamilcar, the Carthaginian, on his way to Syracuse from

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Messana, to march his troops round by the back of the mountain. In 126 B.C. Etna poured forth streams of lava, and "the sea by Lipara boiled furiously, several ships being burnt by subterranean fires, and a quantity of dead fish were cast upon the shore, which being devoured by the inhabitants, caused a fatal epidemic." Four years after, Catania was grievously menaced, and would have been utterly destroyed had not the lava, when almost within the city walls, turned at right angles and flowed into the sea. Two eruptions during the civil war between Julius Cæsar and Pompey were believed to portend the death of the latter; and six years later, when Octavianus and Sextus Pompeius were competing for power, the mountain burst forth with such terrible fury that the eastern slope was devastated and rendered uninhabitable.

The Emperor Caligula was frightened from Messana by an outbreak; and another eruption occurred in the second year after the capture of Jerusalem by Titus. In the reign of the

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Emperor Decius (A.D. 254), Etna broke out again with loud bellowings, vomiting a torrent of lava which menaced Catania once more. “ It was on this occasion that the efficacy of St. Agatha’s veil—a feature in subsequent eruptions — was first tested. The terrified citizens rushed to the tomb of the saint, who had been martyred but the year before, and seizing the veil which covered it, took it to the burning torrent, whose course was arrested on the instant.”

Charlemagne seems to have been vastly alarmed by an eruption in 812.

One of the most disastrous convulsions in history occurred during the reign of William the Good, in 1189. “ On the vigil of the feast of St. Agatha, the cathedral of Catania being crowded with people, on a sudden there occurred a most violent earthquake which shook all Sicily to its centre. Catania in an instant was one heap of ruins ; not a house was left standing, and no less than fifteen thousand people were buried beneath the ruins.

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Many towns were thrown to the ground. At Messina, the sea, after retiring a long way from the shore, rushed back with violence upon the city. The cone of Etna was shaken down. New springs gushed out in many places, and old ones disappeared."

Yet another is recorded in 1329, when with a crash like thunder the lava burst forth, while red-hot rocks were hurled into the sea. New craters opened, vomiting lava and other burning matter. The cone of the mountain was overshadowed by immense columns of black smoke, illumined from time to time by vivid coruscations; showers of ashes and sand obscured the air and covered the whole surface of the country, so that the cattle and birds perished for want of food, and these ashes and sand were carried to Malta, a distance of 130 miles.

Reference to the long history of Etna's eruptions, of which there is a record of over eighty, may be closed by the following extract from the account of that terrible one in 1669,

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as related by Sir Charles Lyell. “ It began by the obscuration of the day, like an eclipse of the sun, followed by a furious whirlwind and earthquakes. The people of Nicolosi could not keep their legs, and everything around them seemed to be heaving and rolling like ships in a rough sea. A fissure twelve miles long opened in the mountain-side. Then six other mouths opened in a direct line with the fissure, vomiting columns of smoke and sand to the height of 1,200 feet, accompanied by subterranean roars and terrible thunders which could be heard at a distance of forty miles, and such convulsions of the earth that Catania, twelve miles off, was tottering to its fall. At the close of the day another and still larger mouth opened a mile below the others, which to the same phenomena added the ejection of red-hot stones to an enormous height, and of sand and ashes in prodigious quantities, which covered the country to a distance of sixty miles. From this mouth gushed a stream of lava, which

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soon spread out to the width of two miles ; and in its descent encountered the wooded cone of Montpilieri, which it encircled with flames ; then, turning westward, it next day reached Belpasso, a town of eight thousand inhabitants, which in a short time was entirely submerged in a sea of fire. That same evening seven fresh mouths opened round the large one, vomiting smoke and red-hot stones with terrific roars ; and in three days they united with the original mouth to form one vast crater, a horrible chasm some 2,500 feet in circuit. The torrent advancing with a front of two miles, had overwhelmed a good portion of the town of Mascalucia. The same day the great mouth cast up ashes, sand and scoriæ in such quantities as to form an enormous double conical mound, now known as the Monti Rossi, and to cover the houses in the neighbourhood to a depth of six feet. Fresh violent earthquakes shook down the great cone into the crater, so as to lower considerably the height of the mountain. The lava had separated into

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three separate streams. One destroyed the village of San Pietro ; another that of Camporotondo ; the third, which ultimately attained the width of four miles, devastated the land of Mascalucia, destroyed San Giovanni di Galermo, and proceeded towards the town of Misterbianco, which it encircled in its fiery arms and utterly destroyed. After overwhelming fourteen towns and villages, it turned towards Catania, and, reaching Albanelli, hardly two miles from the city, it lifted up and transported to a considerable distance an argillaceous hill covered with corn-fields, then an entire vineyard, which floated for some time on its burning bosom. At length it reached the walls of the city. Meeting this obstacle, the lava flood accumulated till it rose to the top of the rampart, which was sixty feet in height, and then tumbled over in a cascade of fire, overwhelming part of the city with the ruins of the ancient Naumachia and Circus. The wall was not here overthrown : in another part, however,

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the lava entered the city through a breach and threatened the city with destruction. It reached the sea, which it entered in a stream two miles wide, till it formed a promontory more than half a mile in advance of the original shore. Then began a contest between the water and the fire. The lava, cooled at its base by contact with water, presented a perpendicular wall of forty feet high. As the fiery torrent, rolling onward in a viscous mass, reached the adverse element, the water began to boil furiously, while clouds of steam rose with a horrible whistling sound to obscure the sun, and then fell again in a salt shower."

It is not a matter for wonder, therefore, if with a history so direful, those who live on the Mountain's slopes are in great dread when it is in an angry mood. To the terror of the seen and the known is added the fear of the unknown.

Etna has been the parent of myth and legend from the earliest days of mankind.

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Perhaps no mountain in the world has provoked the wonder, the admiration, the dread, the superstitious awe that Etna has inspired. Its majestic height of nearly eleven thousand feet ; its base washed by the blue waves of the Ionian Sea ; its summit crowned by a diadem of snow ; its vast slopes covered with tropical vegetation and with spreading orchards and forests, to end with the forbidding black desert of rock and scorix—

That dreary plain, forlorn and wild,
The seat of desolation, void of light,
Save what the glimmering of these livid flames
Cast pale and dreadful :

all these appeal strongly to the imagination, to a sense of the wonderful, to the lover of beauty. Etna, indeed, lives more than any other mountain. Fondly regarded by those finding an easy existence on its slopes, ever beloved of the poet and the painter, the Mountain presents a being full of love and activity. The untiring and inexhaustible fer-

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tility of the soil, whereon a dormant state of Nature is unknown, coupled with its secret and mysterious inner life, Etna has a subtle existence and attraction that obtain, perhaps, in no other region of the earth. Hated, too, and dreaded, Etna is not only a fond "Mother," but a much-feared tyrant, whose moods are variable and whose temper is unreliable. Etna has been known to be quiescent for long periods. The historian Filoteo records his descent into the crater in 1583, after eighty years of tranquillity, when he found it "shaped like a funnel, and at the bottom a hole hardly as large as a man's head, which emitted a sulphurous vapour, very damp"; though when we visited the crater three hundred years later, we found it to be a huge abyss about four miles in circumference, very deep, and in great activity.

The terror of the inhabitants of the Mountain which we witnessed, is no new thing. It dates from times much more remote than to-day. If the moving sense was that of fear for the

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safety of the individual and his property, it had its origin in the superstitious dread of days when Etna was the mysterious realm of Aidoneus, the involuntary home of Persephone, the workshop of Vulcan and the Cyclops, and the prison of that Enkelados, the Typhon, “ whose groans are the roars of the volcano, and his efforts to free himself the earthquakes which make the earth tremble.” Local legend and tradition, which formerly were religious beliefs, still have their power in the complex nature of the dwellers on Etna, and still enter into the atmosphere of their lives. They account largely for the innumerable myths and superstitions met with, now in one garb and now in another, by a student of the manners and customs of a very interesting people.

Despite modern tendency to unbelief, or agnosticism, ancient ideas and creeds are reverted to. Dormant superstitions, whether of mediæval or earlier origin, start into life and vigour in times of panic such as those

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which we witnessed. Power of the priesthood is resumed. Propitiation to ancient gods finds its counterpart in the votive offerings to the saints. Humility and contrition take the place of indifference and scepticism, as in early days.

This explains partly why during the eruption churches were crowded at all hours by men, women, and children ; why fervent discourses from pulpits were eagerly listened to ; why long processions of many people, headed by priests in their robes carrying sacred relics amid the smoke of many tapers, wound their way up the stony slopes of the mountain to oppose the advance of the lava.

We saw people in tearful supplication, in agonies of fear, in stoical indifference (in the Sicilian character is met sometimes a philosophical stoicism contrasting favourably with the usual abandonment to transports of grief or fear, for which the admixture of Eastern blood in Sicilian veins may possibly account) ; people, also, in contrite submission to the in-

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evitable, or in protest and solemn objugation against a pitiless fate. Many watched the slow but certain destruction of their homes by the advancing lava. In some places the ruin was awaited by an entire family, amid the wailing of the women. In others, men, assisted by their neighbours, removed their possessions, doors, windows, and even tiles of the houses in extreme haste. Here the stream rose behind a staunch wall, to surmount it and pour its cascade upon the roof, which burst into flame. There the current silently surrounded a house to engulf it, absorbing the tottering walls in its burning embrace. Men and women were seen carrying aged relatives, or mattresses and the scanty possessions which go to compose the furniture of a Sicilian home. Those were scenes to make the heart ache.

Not less terrible in its destruction than magnificent as a spectacle, was this eruption of mighty Etna—that Mountain of Mountains called *famoso, immenso, terribile*—that “ Mother ” of smiling lands, that “ Nurse of

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sharp eternal snow," that home of ever-living fire, which dominates the lives of Sicilians like a god, and as a god dispenses both favours and vengeance with a lavish hand.

VINTAGE

VINTAGE

AS the summer sun loses some of its tropical heat, and the nights of perpetual starlight become less oppressive, the grapes on the vines swell and turn from green to purple, or to colour of gold. The careful husbandman now strips the leaves from their stems, to let in upon the fruit those warm rays of the sun which are to have so important a share in bringing the bunches to full maturity.

So with human beings. Who may deny that they of southern countries have more sunshine in their natures than those of northern lands? It is needless to dwell upon the fact that the sun-god expands and sweetens human life, giving warmth to the body, adding geniality to the soul. Should some heart-frozen dweller in northern lands refuse to concede so much,

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at least he will agree that Bacchus must go hand in hand with Apollo if ever the acrid grape of the chilly months be changed to the luscious juice of that fruit which the son of Semele brought from the gods for the benefit of mankind.

Small wonder, then, that writers of old, more impressed by the potentiality of the beautiful than we, should endow vine and vintage with the praise and poetry we know so well. It is a theme of great attraction—one in which the more responsive of Nature's bounties seem to combine in producing a whole of simplicity and beauty. The long, cloudless days now tempered with soft breezes, are welcomed by man and beast alike as respite from the suffocating heat of summer. Vegetation, scorched and parched, revives after the forced idleness of many months. Birds, driven to cooler altitudes, return. Happy faces, merry voices, and busy fingers, all the happier and all the merrier because abundant is the pay, and all the more busy, because the work

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admits of no delay, meet in the vineyards, making the countryside resound with laughter and merriment. Music, too, is not wanting; and dancing often finishes a day, only to be matched by the one following for light-hearted gaiety and joy. If such be not a proper theme for a poet's pen, where is one more fitting to be found?

Let us stroll to the plantations on a bright October morning, taking our stand on a mount rising from the vineyards, its sides covered with vines. A plain stretches on all sides to the bases of mountains and hills. These are of various shapes, and of different heights; one capped by crags of grey limestone boldly defined, another covered from foot to summit with forests of oak and beech. The sea of green at our feet is of many tints, and ripples in the sunshine when a passing breeze ruffles its surface. The first quietness of the scene is disturbed by a throng of women and boys returning from their trip to the winepress, to fill again the large wicker baskets which they

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poise so cleverly on their heads. We are surrounded by the laughing, chattering crew, the members of which exchange salutations with us, and we watch them as they deftly cut the hanging fruit from the parent stem.

The elder women are not good-looking. The work which has been their lot from earliest childhood, has stamped their faces with an unlovely look of toil. But the girls, with their large dark eyes, and the boys with their roguish looks, are attractive enough. Nor can much be said of the cleanliness of their attire, for without exception untidiness and dirt are the most noticeable feature in the dress of every one. But, notwithstanding, the smiling faces, the daring combination of colour in the kerchiefs tied turban fashion about the head, dotted jewel-like among the green foliage, the varied costumes proclaiming the different towns from which the people come, the purple fruit hanging in great clusters, the bronze and ruby shades of those leaves already speaking of autumn and decay; all these

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dominated by deep blue sky, and warmed by radiant sunshine, are the same which moved the ancients to poetry and do not fail to make due impression upon us to-day.

As the bagpipe, heading the procession, gives a sign for each worker to shoulder his load of fruit and fall into line, we will also go with the servants of Bacchus to his temple, the winepress, where various mysteries are carried on. The piper is blowing his most cheerful measure as we join in the rear of the procession, and, had we not northern blood in our veins, we might be tempted to emulate the tripping steps of the younger votaries of the Wine God, who, out of very lightness of heart, dance their several paces to the more measured tread of their soberer and older companions.

At the winepress basket after basket is handed in, and when their contents have been passed through sieves to detach the berries from the stalks, the grapes are under the feet of the must-dyed treaders. The juice soon

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rushes from the tramp of many feet ; these for the sake of cleanliness being encased in leather mocassins. The juice thus expressed runs into large vats, and when all has been well trodden from the grapes, juice and pulp will ferment together for a period determined by the judgment of the wine-maker.

It is now that the must, or wine in embryo, takes its lighter or darker hue, because the longer or shorter time it remains with the skins, the deeper or lighter is the colour. It is incorrect to suppose that white wine must come from white grapes ; although it is true that pure red wine can only be produced from purple grapes. White wine can be made from these same grapes, inasmuch as all grape juice is white. Colouring is obtained from the skins ; and the longer the latter be allowed to ferment with the juice, the darker will be the eventual colour of the wine. From the vats in the winepress the must is transferred to the cask, where it finds its conversion into wine, followed by a clearing, racking, and

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maturing. But these are operations carried out long after the last bunch of grapes has been picked from the vineyard.

As we are dividing our attention between the bare-legged *pistatori* tramping incessantly to snatches of wild chorus and the music of concertina and tambourine, and the many mules loading the wine-stained pigskins in the yard, we are attracted by a sight common enough in olden days, but now a relic of the past. Formerly, when Fra Serafino and his many brown-robed brethren with their rope girdles came riding down on sleek mules to the winepress, to receive as their due the barrel of wine that every devout Christian set aside for the Madonna and the Saints, the dishevelled women and girls, the wine-stained men, and the impudent boys bowed the knee and asked a blessing of the holy friars. But to-day the *frate*, the last of his race, arrives on foot, leading a donkey as thin and decrepit as himself, and, unnoticed by the crowd, whines in a humble voice a petition for a modicum

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of the must, which he craves as an act of charity. It is a sign of the times. The monk himself seems to have recognized that the drones have been expelled from our busy twentieth-century hive ; and, if perchance they will not amend their ways and join the bees in work, they must be content to accept the sorry portion of those who live in idleness and want. The friar departs with his barrel full. As with cunning twinkle of the eye he offers thanks on behalf of the Madonna, his smile of gratitude seems to denote that not everywhere does he receive the small contribution which he carries off to his solitary cell.

The lengthening shadows on the hills tell that evening is approaching, and the dew puts an end to grape gathering. The vintagers have made their last journey for the day. We suppose them to be tired with their many trips to and from the vineyards. But such is not the case. The piper seems to have forgotten that he has been playing all day long ; the men in the winepress that they have worked

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as any criminal on a treadmill ; the women and boys that the baskets on their heads have been filled with anything heavier than air. Preparations are made for the dance, and accordion and tambourine are pressed into the service so that there may be no flagging in the music.

Young and old join in the dance ; every one vies with his companions in a variety of steps, for which no names have been invented, but which seldom fail to be graceful and pleasing. That old woman in a ragged stuff petticoat and bodice laced over a camicia, which once was white, with two long plaits of hair down the back, and a yellow kerchief about her head, might have taken lessons from the great Taglioni herself for all the grace and stateliness of her movements. Her *vis-à-vis* is a laughing youth stained to his thighs in grape juice ; and the bow he gives her before turning to meet another partner, would not disgrace a palace.

The fun waxes greater, the music louder.

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The glances become warmer, the gestures more alluring. Those who do not dance stand around beating hands in rhythm with the tune, inciting the dancers to greater efforts with their cries. All become intoxicated with the movement and joy of the dance. It is a renewal of the Bacchanalia, the feast of the Wine God; and for the moment thoughts wander irresistibly far away to the journeyings of Bacchus and his triumphs, to Silenus—his preceptor, and the Bacchantes—his companions; to Ariadne—to the days when the ancient world surrendered itself unreservedly to do him honour.

The moon is shining brightly as we leave those light-hearted Sicilian children (they seem never to grow old nor show signs of age except in their weather-worn faces) still dancing under the stars; and we hear the lilt of the dance music floating toward us on the night air as we retrace our steps homeward.

**RAGUSA
IN SICILY**

RAGUSA IN SICILY

I

PROBABLY few people who are driven over the smoother streets of London or Paris know that much of the asphalt with which those streets are paved comes from the classical land of Sicily, dug from the mountain of Ragusa, a town in the south of that island.

The origin of the town itself is lost in remote antiquity. Identified with the Heraian Hybla of the ancient Greeks (the latter name, according to Freeman, is to be traced to the goddess Hybla of the nether world, worshipped by the Sikels, and who may be compared to the Greek Persephone), and founded, no doubt, by the Sikels, since the neighbourhood offers traces of their presence in the rock-hewn caves and wells, the town seems to have

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continued to be Sikel rather than Greek after the latter nation was firmly established in the island. It was a seat of worship of the goddess Hybla also, though it is not to be confounded with the other two towns having that name, the Galeatic Hybla (now Paternò) on the slopes of Mount Etna, and the original home of her veneration; nor with the Greater Hybla, over against Megara of Sicily, famous in old days, as now, for its honey.

This Heraian Hybla does not appear to have taken a great part in history, though in B.C. 491 Hippokrates, the ambitious and treacherous tyrant of Gela, made war against it, and indeed met his death when undertaking its siege. Probably Hybla was not then conquered, as it joined with other towns shortly afterwards to assist the "one great Sikel leader," Ducetius, in his ambitious scheme to erect a Sikel kingdom in Sicily in opposition to the Greek domination. It is not known if Hybla lost its freedom owing to the defeat and banishment of that remarkable man, or

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whether it regained its liberty with other towns later on. If its history be scanty, it proves that its ways were mainly peaceable ; and it is owing to this that Hybla was spared the fate of its friend and neighbour, Kamarina, which suffered so severely for its warlike propensities.

Hybla received the men of Kamarina when they fled before the avenging Greeks of Syracuse ; after which it sinks into the darkness of the ages, to reappear under its modern name of Ragusa. It is hard to trace the origin of the change of name. The first mention of it is to be found in the account of the Saracenic conquest, A.D. 848, when the town was besieged. In 867 Ragusa was again invested, and came near to destruction. It was feudalized after the Norman Conquest, and was bestowed on Geoffrey, son of Count Roger de Hauteville, the intrepid founder of the Royal Norman House of Sicily. It became Crown property, but afterwards passed into the possession of the Chiaramonte family,

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who styled themselves Counts of Modica and Lords of Ragusa. These, falling under the displeasure of King Martin, were dispossessed, and in turn Ragusa became the property of the Cabrera and Henriquez families, when it again reverted to the Crown. It is stated that the Royal House of Stuart enjoyed, and possibly still retains, the above-mentioned titles; but it does not seem to have derived any revenues from the place.

Ragusa has an unique position on the summit of a grey calcareous mountain some 1,500 feet above the level of the sea. Its houses cling desperately to the sides of the mountain. Its situation is at once striking and very beautiful. It is composed of two towns joined, with separate civic administrations. "*Italia una Ragusa due*," is a jeering remark made by the rest of Sicily to this divided community. Though Ragusa Inferiore is claimed to be the older of the two, it is difficult to believe that Hybla Heraia of the Sikels did not occupy part of the site of

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Ragusa Superiore, for the acropolis of the ancient city was certainly at the highest point of the mountain in accordance with custom, and not where it would have been easily dominated from another site, as in the lower town. This is a vexed question among many others in Ragusa. For several centuries feuds between the two have existed, dating from a divergence of opinion as to the rival merits of St. George, the patron saint of the lower, and of St. John, the patron saint of the upper town. Such rivalry was by no means restricted to amicable discussion. The folk of the upper town were wont to enforce arguments of their own superiority and that of their patron on their more lowly neighbours by the rolling and hurling of stones and rocks, which, owing to the roofs of the latter being on a level with the doorsteps of the former, carried weight in the discussion. The others, in answer to the insults to them and their patron saint, replied with the still more cutting argument of knives and firearms.

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Both towns have a modern aspect. The walls of ancient date and ruins of turrets are still seen, to speak of the fortress city of old times, when might was right and the strong hand only could hold that which was its due. In the lower town the ruined church of St. George has a fine Norman Gothic doorway, with deep mouldings and rich carvings. To-day the upper town, though less aristocratic—Ragusa boasts of noble families—is more populous and prosperous than the other. This is shown by wider and better paved streets, and houses of more pretentious taste, especially those leading to the piazza before the spacious Church of St. John.

Below, far down, runs the little river, the Hyrminos of ancient times, the Irmemo of to-day, fringed by its many mills, all with foaming cascades falling over revolving wheels, or bubbling streams issuing from arched foundations. Countless ravines and minor valleys contribute collected waters in the rainy season ; but now, in spring-time, the river is placid

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and clear, and the fisherman on the bank is undisturbed in his quest for the much-prized trout, as he leisurely throws his line on the breeze and places his fly on likely pools.

Sides of the valleys are terraced by countless walls of stone, to hold back the earth for vines and olive-trees, almond and carob-trees—terraces of verdure of brilliant hue. The land is rich, and water is never wanting except in the hottest days of summer. There pink almond blossom contrasts strikingly with a sky of densest blue; here a patch of flax in flower—a turquoise jewel set in russet brown, the colour of the earth—meets the eye. Grey rocks of limestone rise precipitously from the valley, their faces honeycombed by caves (which the living inhabit even now) and by tombs long since rifled in search of that hidden treasure of which the folk of both Ragusas have talked and dreamt for centuries and never found.

The road, cunningly contrived and ably hewn, zigzags in lazy gradients, or bends in

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graceful curves to the arched bridge giving access to the upper town. Great tufts of euphorbia, cactus, and aloes spring from crevices. The shimmering silver leaves of the olive, and brighter foliage of fruit-trees, protrude from among the yellow lichen-covered stones, or hang in giddy poise over precipices, giving ever-varying tones of green, and vying with the brighter tints of moss and grass in vivid contrast to each other. At the highest point of rock rises a wooden cross, to be replaced by one of iron when time and subscriptions of the devout permit this simple memorial to give way before a more worthy monument, to remind men of the *Anno Santo* just now brought to a close. Around are quarries, worked for many a year, as a tablet in one of them testifies, relating how it was placed there in the *Anno Lagrimoso*, or the sorrowful year—the year of the plague, 1368.

Certainly Ragusa is a place to be visited. If a traveller take his stand one fine spring evening on some prominent rock or miniature

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piazza, he will witness a scene which cannot but linger long and pleasantly in his memory. The sun is sinking, streaking the western horizon with purple, gold, and crimson; and so bright with glory is the sky, that the eyes turn with relief to the haze of ruddy violet which hangs about the farther valleys. The plain and the grey rocks of the mountains repeat the violet hue. In the distance the sea is molten fire. Below, along the principal pathways leading upward to the town, converging from farmhouse and sheepfold, a stream of country folk with herds of cattle or flocks of sheep wend their way homeward, accompanied by donkeys laden with nodding sheaves of grass or loads of wood, the spoils of the day's work on the hillsides. The mountains are cut and intersected with lanes hedged by blossoming plants leading to house, chapel, or shrine. Immediately below is a chaos of sloping roofs, domes, and *campanili*, bathed in the light which softens the straight lines and glaring whites of modern buildings.

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The keynote of colour is a golden purple, effulgent, rich, enchanting ; and it wants no great stretch of imagination to suppose that Nature in her varying moods has willed to-night that all the land should lay aside its work-a-day appearance, and for her especial pleasure put on a garb of translucent splendour.

Or let a wanderer be standing here during the last three days of carnival, when the merry doings in the towns are calling the peasants from homestead and hamlet, from hut and mill. A long line of country people may be descried, accompanied by mules, donkeys, and dogs. The men are dressed in rude homespun ; the women, in brighter skirts and coloured kerchiefs, make up for the sombre clothing of the sterner sex. Our wanderer may see an old fellow in a rusty cloak with a hole which shows that it, like its owner, has known better days ; or a joyous band of good-looking youths dancing hand in hand up the steep pathway, casting bold glances at

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the maidens who follow their mothers with demure countenances but roguish eyes, ready with repartee or peal of laughter to meet joke with joke, to increase the merriment of the moment. Many of the younger folk are garlanded with almond blossom, irises, or bunches of yellow broom; and even the donkeys and dogs are decked with flowers and feathers, so that they too may add to the gaiety of the scene. Songs and laughter, jests and greetings, fill the air. An atmosphere of enjoyment and content is abroad, a sense of fellowship in rejoicing; and the onlooker must be of a singularly cold temperament if his heart yield not to its influence and the charm of the sunshine and blue sky above him. Above all may be seen the vast pile of Etna; her heights dominating those of Ragusa, distant though they be; and "the pillar of heaven" lies there, white and massive, a silent witness of all things near and far.

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II

But asphalt—the Asphaltos of Aristotle and the somewhat less clear definition of Pliny, Bitumen — calls for attention. The name asphalt is derived from the so-called Lacus Asphaltites, or Dead Sea, where the mineral was found in ancient times. “It is regarded as the ultimate result of a series of changes which takes place under certain conditions in organized matter, producing naphtha, petroleum, mineral tar, and asphalt. These substances are said to merge into one another by insensible degrees.” Such is the learned, if somewhat vague cause assigned for the existence of asphalt.

Asphalt deposits are found throughout the world. In Trinidad there is a bituminous lake which has a deposit of asphalt. “It is intersected with rivulets of water, and at one or two spots on the surface of the lake may be seen an emission of semi-fluid tar.” The ancients used to associate such places with the

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infernial regions. Asphalt in its more valuable condition is a limestone impregnated with bituminous matter. It is found notably at Val de Travers, in the canton of Neufchatel, and at Ragusa. The deposit in Switzerland was discovered by Eirinus, a physician of Greece, in 1712, who recommended the material as being "peculiarly suitable for covering all kinds of constructions, to protect wood and stone against decay, worms, and the ravages of time, rendering them almost indestructible even when exposed to wind, wet, and extreme variations of temperature." Asphaltic mortar was used in the building of Babylon, and asphalt itself was employed by the Egyptians in embalming the bodies of their dead.

The existence of asphalt at Ragusa was probably known to the Greeks, even if they made no use of it, for a neighbouring district where it is found is called Mafita, which is probably a corruption of the Greek word for bitumen. It is not recorded if the Romans

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worked the mines ; so the commercial importance of the mineral deposits probably dates from recent times. Swiss savants in the pay of the King of Naples applied for mining rights in 1838, and later on French engineers made a similar demand. But the plans of both had to be abandoned owing to the arduous conditions imposed by the Government—a policy suicidal to the industrial interests of the country and from which Italian statesmen have not been able to separate themselves up to the present day. It was left to English enterprise to develop a work which is yearly growing in importance.

The mineral at Ragusa is found impregnated in the rocks lying at different depths below the surface. At places it crops up in the form of a light-coloured grey stone of calcareous formation ; but that is of inferior quality, possessing about 3 per cent. of bitumen, and has at present little or no commercial value. The more valuable deposits, which appear inexhaustible, are found below that

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stratum in layers of varying thicknesses, and the lower they are found, the richer in percentage of the mineral is the stone. Little is seen on the surface to indicate the presence of anything of value immediately below. Indeed, it comes as a surprise that exceptionally barren and rain-washed hill-tops, mostly of grey rock and scanty patches of poor soil, should be of great value to the capitalist.

The mines of the Société Générale des Asphaltes de France—an English Company registered under a French name—are the largest of a group of five at Ragusa. In some places the mineral has been dug from the top, or *a scalone*—that is, in layers, or steps, four or five feet high. Here long galleries are excavated in the sides of the ravines, allowing the richer rock to be reached more quickly. Leaving immense piles of poorer stone (many thousands of tons await the day when science may discover a value for them), the visitor descends through an arch

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into a large excavation of rock, measuring about a hundred yards long and fifty wide, surrounded by perpendicular walls fifty feet high, and open to the sky. Here on one side are men and boys hewing from surface to base, and in steps, as mentioned, with picks, wedges, and sledge-hammers. On another side are the entrances to the galleries, from which issue the sound of blasting and the rumble of trolleys bearing material from the bowels of the earth. There are no cages or lifts, as in other mines.

The galleries are of vast height and breadth, with a gentle slope towards the entrance ; they are, therefore, dry and well ventilated. These immense rock-hewn caverns seem appropriate enough in this land, sacred to deities of the nether world. Imagination is not heavily taxed to recall the story of Persephone, the rumbling wheels of the golden chariot and "immortal horses" of Aidoneus, Persephone in his arms, as the "King of the great nation of the dead" bears away the unwilling maiden

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from the flowers of neighbouring Henna and her playmates to his realms below. Nor, indeed, should we be surprised to meet the blue-hooded Demeter, "veiling her beauty under a worn countenance, having blazing torches in her hands, seeking Persephone over land and sea," and resting not for the weariness of her mind and quest. A veritable son of Hephæstus we do surely see in his cave of blackened stone, with anvil, forge, and fire, sparks flying before the breathing of his bellows and the force of his mighty strokes, the presiding genius of iron and steel of the mine. This is a picture in harmony with the spot, for all is dark and sombre here, and the air is charged with sulphurous fumes. The man is a model of youthful comeliness and strength as he stands at his forge, with hand resting on the massive sledge while he waits for the iron to heat anew, a stone table for his food and a rocky seat for his repose on the one side, a pile of tools and rusted iron on the other. We are tempted to believe

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that we have followed Dis to Hades, and are assisting at the forging of Zeus' thunderbolts, or the shield of Herakles.

But to return to the asphalt. At the end of the long galleries, which are intersected at intervals by others, gangs of eight to ten men work by the aid of lamps which cast a fitful and lurid light on the rugged sides and vaults. From crevices ooze small streams of black viscous liquid, which is the pure bitumen expressed by the weight of rocks. The smell, as has been said, is very pungent and prevalent; but the absence of mud and all dirt is remarkable; for bitumen has cleansing properties which remove both. The quarried stone, when brought in trolleys to the mouth of the mine, is carefully looked over by a long line of men and boys, who know at a glance the value of each block; it is sorted and packed in carts, to be sent to Syracuse or the little roadstead of Mazzarelli for shipment.

The most valuable samples have a uniform

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colour of dark grey or brown, and they must be smooth in grain. Such asphalt is used for paving streets and for chemical purposes. The inferior qualities serve for many building purposes, according to the hardness of the stone ; that of greater resistance to the influence of the weather being a stone in which clay is not found. Asphalt stone is impervious to damp. Slabs are readily cut by hand-saws, especially when the blocks have been heated at a fire. The stone has a beautiful grain, which, when polished with ordinary wood varnish, takes the appearance of a fine brown marble. These slabs are now replacing marble as tops of chests of drawers and other furniture ; and more ordinary articles, such as tanks, paving tiles, and mullions, are readily and cheaply constructed from them. The export of asphalt from Ragusa is steadily increasing.

The mines employ a vast number of men and boys who are fairly paid, and who seem well-to-do and healthy. Indeed, asphalt mining is a salubrious occupation. It is stated

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that no one employed in the mines was attacked by cholera during its various visitations, and no one suffers from malaria, which is prevalent in the neighbourhood in the summer-time.

**THE NEW
RELIGION**

THE NEW RELIGION

THE prevalence of Socialism in northern Italy, where comparative wealth and prosperity are found, over Socialism in the central or southern parts, where there is less prosperity, merits some notice from those who are interested in Italian politics, or in the march of Socialism generally. In England the contrary holds, for there the greater the riches and the more educated the masses, so much the more faithful to existing institutions are the people. The reason of this difference, as far as Italy is concerned, is neither complex nor difficult to find. It is the natural and logical outcome of events that have happened in the last fifty years.

The realization of the grand ideal of an United Italy, which was mainly the child of

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the north, where it was nurtured and reared with its noble aspirations, its hopes, its indomitable fixity of purpose, and its sacrifices of blood and treasure, has been retarded by the incomplete achievement of national hopes, thereby engendering disillusion and discontent. Taking account of the Italian temperament, disappointment is both reasonable and inevitable. The north of Italy, intelligent, strenuous, hard-working, as well as prosperous, resents the inefficiency of the public service and has little confidence therein. It sees that there is something wrong with the system, and with the hot-headedness peculiar to the race, is not averse from the idea of a change, in the hope of yet realizing the ideal of half a century ago. A restlessness caused by disappointment is the principal reason of Socialism in the north.

In the south of Italy the old feudal spirit so far has been strong enough to resist the advance of Socialism. It is true that feudalism has been abolished for many years, long before

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the so-called liberation of Italy took place. But after centuries of subjection and submission of its people to various dominations and to the priesthood, notably in Calabria and Sicily, the old feeling of attachment to their superiors still remains to withstand subversive teachings of democrats. For how long they will resist the seductive arguments in favour of a socialistic millennium poured into their ears incessantly by industrious agitators, is not a difficult question to answer.

Discontent does and necessarily must exist in the south. Southern Italy resents the heavy taxation ; it grumbles that it is misunderstood and is less favoured at Rome than the north ; its vanity is hurt by the ill-concealed contempt shown for it by its northern compatriots, so that here, too, Socialism has found a likely and, perhaps, surer field for development. The south took its fair share of the struggle for Italian unity, and the failure of its ideal to materialize must weigh on men's minds.

I have laid stress on the disappointment

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consequent on the tardy realization of the golden dream to which the hope of an United Italy gave rise. The sentimental side of any question concerning Italians must be considered when dealing with it. No other reason than sentimentalism can be accepted for the extraordinary and somewhat extravagant solicitude shown in Italy over the language question in Malta. Though that matter cannot have any real value to them, nor is there any real sympathy between the Italians and Maltese, yet the controversy was so strongly taken up by the former, that Mr. Chamberlain's toleration of it some years ago was hailed with joy on all sides, and he was exalted to a position in Italy which he had scarcely enjoyed among other foreign nations.

The true source of discontent in both the north and south is the unsatisfactory manner in which the administration of justice is conducted. It is not too much to say that by the lack of complete honesty and fair play among all grades of the community men are

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driven to despair and the future welfare of the country is threatened. The curse of unreliability lies upon the land like a cloud charged with electricity, threatening the present, obscuring the future, and likely to burst at any moment. There are courts of justice which are fields of intrigue, where influential persons are permitted to manipulate the law for private ends, and complaisant judges weakly concede what is demanded of them either through fear or in the hope of favours in return. In parts of Italy, especially in the south, people have lost necessary faith in the impartiality of the law; and frequently, the most that honest folk can hope for is that their adversaries may lack the means or power to use illicit influence in their law-suits. It would be wrong to assert that there are no honest judges. But not all have the courage to oppose a tampering with the course of justice, either through fear or lack of public spirit.

One reason of this corruption is to be

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attributed to the miserable stipends paid to men called to decide matters of great pecuniary importance. Those have to maintain for themselves and families a position in society which national pride exacts ; yet their salaries are lower than that of a responsible clerk in an English commercial house. Temptation is therefore much increased. The administration of the law is too lax : until this be remedied so long will national discontent, never stationary, but always growing in gravity and intensity, be a menace. Much might be written of the corruption that prevails in other branches of public service, of the incessant intriguing to obtain employment or advantage. But it is useless to dwell on this subject, for when the persons who are responsible for enforcing the laws are unscrupulous, it is easy to presume that lower officials follow in their footsteps.

It is in no mood of captious criticism that stress is laid on this curse of dishonesty, for even a cursory study of Italian life shows this

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to be a great and real danger threatening the future. Little can be hoped for a nation composed of many peoples differing in character and even yet imperfectly welded together, which has not the common bond of faith in the future—a faith which must necessarily and primarily be founded on justice and equity. With this faith established in the minds of Italians there is little to prevent the race that has known how to struggle bravely and succeed manfully from becoming strong and prosperous.

Italian Socialists have been more astute than other political parties. They have recognized the desire for a purer atmosphere, and though they are scarcely more straightforward than their fellows, they have made anti-corruption one of their election cries. In so doing they have enlisted sympathy even if they have excited derision. It is the strongest cry that they could raise; it is a pity that it be left to them.

Socialistic propaganda has received much

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encouragement ; but it is hoped and credibly supposed that the large anti-socialistic majority may be aroused from its lethargy to save the country from a leap in the dark. The same misfortune holds in Italy as in France : the upper classes mostly abstain from active participation in political matters on account of the unwholesome atmosphere that surrounds politics. But it may be hoped that in the moment of peril the pure breath of true Italian life may remove the danger of upheaval and restore the calm of honest endeavour and social advance.

It is said that the army, though subjected to revolutionary endeavours, is free from socialistic taint. It will be an unfortunate moment when the House of Savoy can no longer rely on its faithful soldiers.

Owing to the custom of looking kindly upon strikes and encouraging campaigns against capital, Socialists have got out of hand, and there are difficult and grave questions to be settled in consequence of that weak and

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wavering policy. Strong and fearless men are needed at the helm ; or at least a great awakening on the part of patriots to fight the danger and avert the evil—an evil all the greater since it masquerades in the name of liberty.

**A SICILIAN
MURDER**

A SICILIAN MURDER

A MURDER more or less in an island that numbers so many in a year, may not be held of great account. Yet the dastardly deed that deprived the estimable Commendatore Notarbartolo of his life and the country of his services, near Palermo some years ago, is likely to be remembered for all time in the chronicles of crime. The atrocity of the deed was great, the mystery attaching and the impunity which followed it for seven years, greater. But more remarkable still were the revelations in regard to the suppression of proof in order to protect the supposed perpetrators, which came to light before the Court of Assizes at Milan.

Signor Notarbartolo was a man of fifty-eight years when he met his death, and from

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the age of twenty-five had served his country in her battles, first in the Piedmontese army, then under Garibaldi in the war of liberation, and finally in the Italian army, from which he retired as captain. In the troublous times of 1866 he gave further proof of his patriotism, and subsequently filled important posts in the management of local affairs, assuming that of Syndic of Palermo until 1876, when Signor Minghetti selected him to restore the fallen fortunes of the Bank of Sicily, one of the most important financial houses of Italy. In those different and difficult posts Signor Notarbartolo acquired the esteem and affection of his countrymen, and there was probably no one in Sicily more respected and revered than he. At the Bank of Sicily his fearlessness and uprightness were of great value ; but those very virtues were the cause of his death. The Bank had fallen from its high position, and strict measures were necessary to repair the evil. It was duly freed from its parasites and its fortunes re-

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stored ; but by plotting and undue influence its enemies again got the upper hand, and Signor Notarbartolo retired. A Government inspection was ordered to report upon new irregularities, and it was then that Signor Notarbartolo was again indicated as the new Director. It was therefore in the interest of some to prevent his reappointment.

Signor Notarbartolo used to visit a property belonging to him in the neighbourhood of Termini, and set out for it by rail on the last day of January. He slept that night at his place, and the following afternoon started to return by train, in an empty compartment into which he was shown. At a junction he was joined in the carriage by an unknown individual, and the train soon after entered a long tunnel. When it subsequently arrived at Palermo the carriage was empty. Some of the family were awaiting Signor Notarbartolo, and great anxiety was felt at his non-appearance, as his life had been already threatened, and he had also been captured and held to

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ransom by brigands some years previously. Telegrams were dispatched down the line, and an answer came that the body of a man had been found by the side of the railroad on the brink of a torrent, with twenty-seven wounds inflicted by a knife.

Signor Notarbartolo had been the victim of a barbarous murder, and the assassin had thrown the body from the train when crossing the torrent, in the hope that the water would carry it out to sea and remove all trace of it. The compartment was visited, and though but a short time had elapsed, it was evident that means had been taken to remove signs of the deed, as the stains on the floor had been washed and attempts made to put the carriage in order.

So far the story is one of a crime artfully contrived and executed, but not offering any specially sensational features, except the sudden disappearance of a well-known man. The cumbrous machine of the Italian criminal law was put into motion, and subsequent pro-

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ceedings were full of interest as showing the great amount of corruption that had crept into its administration, the incapacity and weakness of those responsible for its application, and, above all, the great power of the *Mafia* to defeat the ends of justice. Arrests were made at the time—arrests always are made in Italy, for that serves to quiet public clamour—and at different intervals. But the case against the accused persons was so carelessly prepared, and so artfully combated by those interested in suppressing the truth, by the mysterious disappearance and falsification of documents, that they were liberated. Public opinion at once had asserted that the responsible authors of the murder were others than those arrested, and names were freely mentioned. Facts were forthcoming, which, if carefully followed up, would probably have brought all the guilty parties to justice. It was stated that a station-master had seen and recognized the mysterious individual who had entered Signor Notarbartolo's compartment before the murder ;

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that a passenger had seen a body thrown from a compartment, out of which a man, wearing a cap resembling those worn by the railway people, subsequently looked ; that the same passenger remarked the occurrence to one of the officials, who affected to ignore the matter ; that two suspicious-looking individuals were seen to leave the train and make their way across country, and that these two were known to have gone to an inn in the vicinity and changed their clothes on the night of the murder ; that both the mysterious passenger and the owners of the inn were notorious members of the *Mafia* and of evil repute ; that a perquisition by the police was made at the inn, where were found underclothing and a towel stained with blood ; and that these articles (which disappeared afterwards) were sequestrated by the police.

It also transpired that threats against Signor Notarbartolo had been uttered by a certain person interested in his disappearance, at whose house was given a feast shortly after

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the murder to the members of the *Mafia*, to celebrate a certain event. Yet these significant facts led to nothing definite, and the crime seemed likely to be numbered among the many that remain a mystery and unpunished to this day.

Fortunately for the hope of the ultimate triumph of justice, the son of Signor Notarbartolo, a lieutenant in the Royal Navy, had sworn to bring the murderers of his father to account, and for seven years he worked patiently, despite the all-powerful yet silent machinations of the *Mafia* to thwart him. It was mainly owing to his untiring efforts that two attendants on the train in which the murder took place were brought to trial at Milan, the case having been removed to that place from Palermo for prudential reasons.

The unfolding of the story before the judge, as elicited by the able cross-questioning of Lieutenant Notarbartolo's counsel, with the subsequent arrest of a third party who was said to be the mysterious individual of the

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train, was breathlessly followed by the Italian public as each day added detail to the story of crime.

When a crime is committed in Italy and denounced to the authorities, an "instruction" is opened by a magistrate. Witnesses are called *in camera*, and their depositions taken down in writing. The case is subsequently brought into court and sustained by the Public Prosecutor on behalf of the law. The offended parties are represented by counsel, and of course the accused is similarly defended. The depositions of witnesses taken immediately after the denunciation of the crime are of great importance, as the truth is more often stated then than after a lapse of time before the trial takes place, which allows witnesses to be suborned or threatened. Peasants and police officers, military and professional men, high officials, and even Ministers of State, men of social rank and convicts, were among those called to give evidence at the trial, and a more conflicting and contradictory lot of testi-

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mony it has probably never been the duty of any court of justice in any land to listen to. It is thus that the influence of the *Mafia* steps in to protect its friends by intimidating the cowardly and controverting the truthful witness by false testimony. So far the trial had really been a fight of the *Mafia* against the law, contested point by point with great persistence, though for some inexplicable reason the weight of the contest had been allowed to rest on the shoulders of Signor Notarbartolo's counsel rather than on those of the Public Prosecutor. The miserable tale was told in court of police officials in fear of, or in apparent league with, the *Mafia*, and openly impeding the course of justice by the suppression of evidence, with their colleagues either guiltily acquiescent or impotent to prevent; of professional men and others of high position figuring as cowardly withholders of facts to which they had previously sworn; of mendacious assertions only corrected on threat of arrest; of grown men driven to tears for

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fear of the consequence of telling the truth ; of witnesses openly approached and threatened in the very ante-rooms of the court ; of the betrayal of private and confidential official reports ; of important documents removed from the volume of the process itself ; of a captain and non-commissioned officers of that part of the army, entrusted with the maintenance of public order being threatened with punishment and admonished for contradictory evidence and grave omission of duty. Part of the evidence of General Mirri, Minister of War, and at one time High Commissioner in Sicily, may be selected from the mass of evidence which was offered during the thirty-three days' trial :—

“ On going to Sicily,” he said, “ I occupied myself at once with the dastardly murder of Signor Notarbartolo, whom I had known in the army. I was aware of his strong and loyal character, which was proof against anything. I keenly deplored that his murderers should go unpunished, and I was convinced

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that the cause of the crime must be sought for in the enmity entertained for him among some administrators of the Bank of Sicily, involved in certain irregular practices about which much was said when he was Director. He had been adroitly removed from his post by the machinations of the *Mafia*, which included anonymous letters, articles in the reptile press, and pressure brought to bear by people of influence on others, such as deputies, senators, magistrates, who, though not members of the *Mafia* themselves, are not outside its influence. Notarbartolo had strenuously opposed certain operations, wherefore it was necessary to get rid of him, in order that the *Mafia* might have access to the Bank. In Sicily, when the *Mafia* wishes to be rid of any one, it frequently begins by attacking his character by anonymous communications and libellous articles in blackmailing newspapers. That makes the public say that the accused person is corrupt; calumny runs its natural course until some personage takes the matter

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up, writes to the Government, and the thing is done. And so it happened with Notarbartolo, who was forced to retire. Further irregularities then commenced at the Bank, and inquiry was ordered, and it was reported that Notarbartolo would be recalled. Hence the grave anxiety of the guilty parties, and it was necessary to get rid of Notarbartolo. At this juncture the crime was committed, but not in the usual manner of a Sicilian murder, which is generally by a shot from behind a hedge. This crime was studied and carefully prepared, which caused me to think that men both clever and powerful had contrived it. It was probably the work of an intelligent and vindictive man, belonging to the council of the Bank, connected and having direct communication with the *Mafia*. In the preparation of the 'instruction' of the case," added General Mirri, "there was the greatest want of energy, negligence and culpability, and it is certain that the official responsible for its compilation was in great haste to close it,

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setting at liberty those who had been arrested. I received many threatening letters."

Count Cadronchi, who was also High Commissioner in Sicily, confirmed General Mirri's deposition in many particulars, especially in regard to the cause and probable authors of the crime. Police magistrates and officials repeated the same. But it was Signor Leopoldo Notarbartolo, the son, who openly accused a deputy as being the instigator. "I was convinced," he said, "that the murder was ardently desired, owing to my father's conduct at the Bank of Sicily, which he saved from the effect of innumerable intrigues. He fought them and he frustrated them, arousing that great hatred which was the cause of his assassination. I centred all my suspicions on that man, who, besides nourishing the greatest hatred for my father, has in him all the capacity for crime."

"But why has not he then been arrested?" asked counsel for the defence, after this long denunciation, lasting over three hours.

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"They have feared to do so," came the fearless answer.

In consequence of these revelations the Chamber of Deputies hastily authorized the arrest of its member, in a manner which precluded possibility of escape, and he was duly sentenced.

The real issue was not the minor one of bringing the murderers of Signor Notarbartolo to punishment, but the greater of showing whether the *Mafia* had more power than the law of the land, and whether right was to be continually overridden by oppression, and justice to go down before corruption and intrigue. For this was no exceptional case of wrongdoing, except for its publicity; it has had its frequent counterpart in everyday life in Sicily, in a major or minor degree.

Justice vindicated, the blood of a good and, according to the period, a great man, was not spilt in vain.

**TO THE TOP
OF ETNA**

TO THE TOP OF ETNA

I HAD been eight years a resident in Sicily, living indeed on the slopes of the mountain, and had never been to the top of Etna. Such a thing was an anomaly. I resolved to make the ascent. I was told that it was not the season for such an excursion; that I should die from cold; that the weather would be unpropitious; that I would see nothing of the scenery that only compensated for the fatigue. But, notwithstanding, I had made up my mind to go, and the Mountain—we in Sicily always call Etna “the Mountain”—being free of clouds at sunset of a late September day, which is an indication that the following twenty-four hours will be fine, a start was made from Catania as the numerous bells of the city were ringing at noon.

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Our party consisted of four persons, my brother V., a friend E., myself, and a guide from the hotel, Giuseppe by name. This guide had packed the carriage to take us as far as Nicolosi with wraps, pillows, provisions, fuel, and other necessities for the ascent. These included a large lantern painted bright red, to which Giuseppe gave great attention, proudly informing us that once it had been in use on board an English man-of-war.

The thermometer marked 80 in the shade, and the sun beat fiercely during our drive over the dusty, lava-constructed roads, making the heat anything but pleasant to us in the thick clothes put on before leaving. The drive through olive and orange groves was picturesque, and every few paces that we mounted gave a finer view of the fair plain of Catania, the city, the classic river Simeto, and the blue mountains in the distance above Syracuse.

Passing through several small towns and villages, we reached Nicolosi, and alighted at

To the Top of Etna

the so-called Hotel dell' Etna, an edifice consisting of two small rooms with three beds in each, and a passage leading to a dirty kitchen at the back.

Nicolosi was then a small village of one street flanked by low houses built of black lava and scorix; the population in the noon-day heat appeared to consist chiefly of gaunt lean pigs. It has scarcely any history except that of destruction, for Etna has dealt very harshly with this poor place.

Here the road ended, and the carriage was exchanged for mules. If Giuseppe had been anxious for our welfare before, here his solicitude knew no bounds. "*Loro Eccellenze* were to eat." (Their Excellencies—it is the Sicilian way of addressing superiors—had already resolved on that, having tasted nothing for six hours.) "They were to rest contentedly until the mules were ready." "They were to leave everything to him and all would go right," said he, with many other suggestions as kindly prompted as they were difficult to act upon.

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Time was passing, and I posted myself at the door to check that incessant flow of talk which every Sicilian of the lower order prefers to action. The scene was laughable. Five mules in a row were being saddled, four for our party, one for the second guide, Antonino, learned in the paths of the mountain, who was also to accompany us. Bustle, confusion, screaming and laughing, mingled with hard words when a mule, aware of the journey before it, refused to be saddled with its load ; Giuseppe in an ecstasy of importance, running hither and thither, ordering here, scolding there, and rewarding with a cuff an officious youth who wished to relieve him of the precious lantern which he held tightly in his hand. I believe Giuseppe valued that lantern more than his life.

At length Giuseppe with a bow announced that everything was ready for the start. We mounted the mules, and oh ! what hard saddles had been requisitioned for our use ! "There are no better," explained Giuseppe.

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Again this excellent guide proved himself a man of resource, by disposing thereon the blankets which were to cover us at night, and in such a manner as to lessen considerably the uncomfortable shape and hardness of the saddles. We defiled slowly along the street, disturbing contented pigs that were lying half-buried in the sand. Antonino, called by his familiars Nino, a stalwart mountaineer, who before our arrival had been engaged in vintaging the grapes in his little vineyard, led the procession. Giuseppe was behind, still wrangling with the youth about the safety of the lantern. So much had been said about the lantern, that we began to look upon it as a public treasure, only to be surrendered with life.

Before reaching Nicolosi we had left fertility behind, the orange groves giving way to stunted rye, olive-trees to an undergrowth of broom and patches of rough grass; and soon signs of cultivation became more rare. Then we reached a region which the volcano had claimed for its own. Masses of black

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and lichen-covered rocks rose from beds of scoriæ and sand. Here were a few plants of cactus, or prickly pear, forerunners of returning cultivation in this lava-stricken land. These added by striking contrast more desolation to the scene.

We had not yet finished with vegetation, however, for the Wooded Region lay before us; and we were told that the lava underfoot was but a stream that broke out of the mountain in 1537. We had passed the twin cones of Monti Rossi of dark red lava, monuments of that direful eruption in the middle of the seventeenth century, which overwhelmed Catania, twelve miles distant, destroying Nicolosi and other surrounding towns and villages. Before us on either side were innumerable extinct craters, each with its name, each with a story of death and destruction.

The big crater and higher parts of the Mountain towered above us, their immense black outlines clearly defined against a sky,

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of deepest blue. After two hours we reached the Chestnut Zone, or Wooded Region, and speedily forgot the desolation of the last few miles. We might have been in an English forest. Chestnut and oak-trees stood thickly around. The ground was covered with green bracken, where the husbandman had not cleared it for his crop of corn. Birds sung gaily; insect life was busy;—such a bright spot seemed unbelievable amid a scene of dire destruction such as that through which we had just passed. What might be its lot in the future? In a day, in a moment, it might be swept away by the hidden fires of the terrible Mountain.

In the higher part of the forest we reached the Casa del Bosco, a hut inhabited by guards of the woods of a Spanish nobleman who owns the land. There we dismounted to rest the mules, and I inquired about this landowner and whether he often came to see his property. “No, Excellency,” was the reply; “the signor was here once to visit his estate, which is very

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extensive, but the weather being bad, he left immediately, and we have not seen him since."

We were soon again on our saddles, and acknowledging the kindly salutations of the men, we faced what was to prove the most fatiguing part of the ascent. We bade farewell to the trees and the birds. Vegetation was represented solely by a few bushes of *genesta etnea*, a species of broom peculiar to the locality, and shabby tufts of grass. Soon not even a stick was to be seen. The pathway was of loose, black sand, into which the mules' feet sank, and the animals began to show signs of exhaustion. Around were nothing but black sandy slopes, dark rocks, gloomy ravines, and countless cones of varied colour. In front rose the Montagnuola, a spur of the mountain almost as high as Etna itself; and far away, standing out from the background of the crater, could be seen the Casa Inglese, a little white house with a tower in the middle of it, towards which our steps were directed.

The sun disappeared behind the mountains

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of the plain, and with its departure the atmosphere chilled and the wind arose. Clouds also gathered on the heights above.

Before reaching the Casa del Bosco we had overtaken two other travellers making the same excursion as ourselves, an English lady and her French husband. The latter was clad in the lightest of alpaca clothing, with canvas shoes on his feet, which attracted the attention of Nino and his companions as particularly adapted to insure to the wearer the greatest amount of bodily discomfort on such an occasion as this. We had been cheerfully exchanging ideas on the scenery, which could not fail to be appreciated by any lover of nature. Giuseppe in the rear, with Nino in the front, kept us amused with songs and jokes bandied between them. But as night succeeded dusk, and the wind increased, our spirits fell with the thermometer, which could not have been far from freezing point, and conversation flagged. Giuseppe had collapsed and looked an inert mass on the back of his

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mule ; Nino, accustomed to the road and to the cold, alone preserved his good humour.

The moon gave us the best of her young light, but clouds of vapour constantly hid her welcome face, and we continued our course, trusting more to the sagacity of the mules to carry us aright than to the reins we held in our hands. On we went and up we toiled by the sides of dangerous precipices and over rugged lava rocks ; ploughing through drifts of sand, stumbling over deserts of stone. The cold had become intense. I tried to warm myself by walking, but after a few minutes on foot I was glad to remount my mule, preferring the cold to the laborious climbing, which the rarefication of the air rendered still more difficult.

We put on all the clothing we had brought, even removing the blankets from the saddles for that purpose. But the chill blast penetrated those coverings like a knife, and hands and feet were numbed.

All was silent except for the roaring of

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the wind and the groans and ejaculations of the Frenchman in his thin clothing and canvas shoes. Every few minutes seemed an hour. I was drowsy with the cold, and half asleep, notwithstanding the friendly hint from Nino that it would be safer to keep my eyes open to the perils of the ascent, when I was aroused from torpor by loud cries of "Pietro ! Pietro !" yelled in a manner such as only a Sicilian can yell.

What had happened? Had Nino gone mad? Or had Giuseppe lost his lantern and was appealing to a patron saint for succour? No. It was the key of the stable at the Casa Inglese that was wanted, an individual by the name of Pietro being the custodian of that article. Pietro was also the guardian of the stores of frozen snow preserved in crevices for the use of the island in the hot summer months. He had his habitation in those parts, Nino told me, and had spent the greater part of his life there. What manner of man could he be, this old man of the mountain, content to

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pass his existence in that lonely region, I asked myself, relapsing into my former torpid state, as we jolted onward without receiving other answer to our cries than weird echoes from the surrounding rocks.

As we drew up behind a sheltering shoulder of the mountain to wind the mules, Nino informed me that we had another half-hour's ride. Despite our sundry warnings, the Frenchman had fallen far behind and was exercising his lungs in shouting lamentations to his wife, who was with us ; lamentations so oft repeated, that neither she or we paid great attention to them. Our animals were now completely exhausted, stopping to breathe every few steps. The wind had become more intolerable and the cold more intense, when, issuing from a hollow, Nino cried triumphantly, "Ecco, la Casa Inglese !" and before us was the house which for six long hours—they had appeared twelve at least—we had been toiling to reach. To dismount was difficult, bodies and limbs were stiff from the sitting posture

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of the long ride, and our heads dizzy from the rarefied state of the air.

Having entered the *casa*, Giuseppe pressed forward, lantern in hand, to give light to the *signori*. He attempted to light the lamp, but alas ! nothing would induce the wick to ignite ; match after match was expended in vain ; either the oil was congealed or the wick was not trimmed, and the effort was without avail. Poor Giuseppe ! He had been looking forward to that moment to confound his enemies, the detractors of his lantern. Even his politeness could not disguise his mortification when I took from my pocket a little railway lamp which ignited easily, and gave us a cheerful light.

Supper was laid on the table, and water to make soup and coffee boiling over a spirit lamp, when the Frenchman appeared with a pale face, gabbling unintelligible English at a pace that was painful to listen to. We learnt with difficulty that there was cause for his excitement ; that a tragic event threatened to

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close our day. He had left his guide, a sickly, ill-fed youth, lying on the ground in a fainting condition and overcome by exhaustion, half a mile down the side of the mountain. A rescue party was organized, of which a flask of brandy was not the least important item, and in a short time the lad was brought in. "Ten minutes later, though," said charitable Nino to him, "and you would have been with the saints in Paradise." I believe he spoke the truth—not about the happy eventual destination of the young fellow, about which I could not, of course, form an opinion, but touching his removal from this sphere.

We found the Casa Inglese, or English House, to be a hut of three rooms, the central one giving access to two others. It received its name because it had been constructed at the expense of officers in the English army of occupation in 1811. To this house has been added lately by the Italian Government an observatory of some pretension, and part of it was the tower we had seen from below.

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During supper Giuseppe had prepared beds on broad wooden shelves around the walls, and with the help of straw, pillows, and blankets, brought with us, we were fairly comfortable. Muffled in our wraps, we sought repose, E. on one shelf, V. and I on a second, the Frenchman and his wife on another. The room had a fireplace, but the chimney had been omitted in the calculations of the builder, for on kindling the fuel smoke poured out into the room in such quantities that it sent us to the door with streaming eyes and gasping breath. Refusing the offer of a charcoal brazier from Giuseppe, we went fireless to rest.

V. and E. were soon fast asleep and snoring loudly, despite the cold, which numbed my feet and hands. I was wakeful, and for some time entertained by the curtain lecture administered by the Frenchman to his wife for having abandoned him to the terrors of that cheerless night on the mountain-side. But the text must have been an old one, or the

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sermon tedious, for long before the gentleman's tongue had ceased the lady was evidently in the land of dreams.

At four o'clock I heard the guides moving in the next room. Giuseppe entered with his lantern, which by vast coaxing he had at length lighted. He again forgot his politeness, and, failing to ask the morning benediction customary in Sicily, commenced a long account of the miseries he had undergone the last few hours. "I've been dead all night long," said he, with native effusiveness, "and it is owing to the charcoal brazier which your Excellency rightly refused to have in your room, but which, in spite of your advice, Nino and his companion insisted on retaining in ours." And indeed the good man looked a pitiable object, though not perhaps as might have been expected in a man who had passed a night as he described.

We were soon marshalled for the ascent of the crater. The English lady, notwithstanding the entreaties, the commands, the tearful

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prayers of her husband to remain behind, solely, I believe, to give him an opportunity of doing the same, pluckily formed one of the party.

Giuseppe, quite a wreck, begged to be excused from accompanying us, and handed to Nino his lantern (which now burned brightly, as if to vindicate its own and its owner's reputation), with solemn injunctions to guard it as he would his life.

Neither the cold nor the wind had diminished. A dim twilight, with a faint glow of red, was seen in the east. We traversed a hundred yards of rough lava with imminent risk to neck and limb before reaching the base of the crater.

"You wish us to go up the side of this wall?" I asked Nino, with dismay, pointing to the black mountain in front of us. "Yes," was the answer, and we resigned ourselves to the circumstances with as much calmness as we could command.

We struggled and toiled up that height,

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wading through ashes half-way to the knees, jumping from rock to rock, sliding on greasy mud or slipping on smooth stone. Our lungs were filled with sulphur smoke which rose from the ground ; our eyes were blinded with dust, and cut by the wind which impeded our progress. Every few minutes we stopped to take breath. V. suffered from giddiness and sickness ; we had to attach him to Nino by a rope ; E. had violent pains in the head ; I, except in my breathing, did not suffer from the altitude and the rarefied state of the atmosphere.

The Frenchman and his wife had succumbed to fatigue in a few minutes after commencing the ascent of the cone. We saw them below, sitting on a rock, in imminent danger of destruction from the stones which, despite our precautions, were detached in our upward progress. The lantern, too, discarded since the twilight had given place to dawn, was lying on the side of the crater in so perilous a position that old Giuseppe, wreck

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of a man as he was, had he known it, would have rushed in hot haste to save it.

With relief we gained the summit.

The east claimed our first attention. Creeping behind a sheltering rock, seated on the warm ashes, we waited for the sunrise. We had not long to wait. Clouds that had gathered on the horizon took a rosy hue and gradually deepened. The sun rose, banked in clouds of crimson and gold. The rays first struck the summit of the cone. In a few seconds a warm tint was communicated to the rest of the crater, to the black slopes of the mountain, lighting the many peaks on its precipitous sides and defining the deep shadows of the ravines. Then the glow spread to the green belt of trees of the Chestnut Zone, to the orange groves and vineyards, to the plain of Catania, to the dark sea beyond.

The scene was of wonderful beauty.

Immediately around, desolation and ruin the most complete. Beyond, a panorama of surpassing charm—Sicily, eleven thousand feet

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below. Beneath us the indented line of coast stretching westward with Augusta, Syracuse, and Cape Passaro; Catania in its false security, and apparently so near that a stone could be dropped into its streets; the plain; the Simeto; the Lentini Lake, bounded by the mountains of Syracuse; countless valleys and torrents; towns and villages; woods and groves, overshadowed by innumerable ranges of hills and pointed mountains, raised one above the other almost perpendicularly by a peculiar power of refraction; all bathed in exquisite blue and lilac tints of marvellous clearness, all reduced to miniature size—these were the chief features of the picture. But imagination must fall short of a true conception of its beauty, words must necessarily fail to give an adequate idea of its vastness.

Our attention was then turned to the crater, and we gazed into it from the highest peak. Blinded, however, by smoke and dust, and warned by the guide that the spot was dangerous, we retreated to a less exposed and safer place, where a drift of frozen snow was

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lying. From there we saw the vast abyss, with its shelving sides encrusted with salts of sulphur and ammonia, of colours varying from bright orange and yellow to white and reddish brown, vomiting clouds of vapour which, when they appeared at the brink of the cone, borrowed hues from the sun as they were carried away through the clear air. There were moments when this outflow of vapour ceased, and we could gaze into the farther depths, but gaze as we would, or change our position as we liked, curious eyes were ever arrested by some projecting crag that shut the fiery secrets from our view and left curiosity unsatisfied. The crater, four miles in circumference, was surrounded by a thin wall of rock rising perpendicularly from the inside.

The descent of the cone was as easy as the ascent had been wearisome. Planting our heels in the ash on our downward course, we reached the base at a breakneck speed in a quarter of an hour.

Giuseppe's lantern was not forgotten; marvellous to relate, it had escaped the

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stones, and was not reduced to fragments as we had expected.

On reaching the Casa Inglese breakfast awaited us. The Frenchman was pathetic; he was continuously complaining in his ceaseless flow of broken English over the destruction of his canvas shoes.

“Serve him right for coming up here in such clothing,” remarked Nino.

His wife was eager to explain that she had wished to ascend the cone with us, adding, with spiteful glances at her husband, that she had not been allowed to leave him. How those two people, with that broken English as the only medium of conversation (for the lady was a true Briton, and disdained all knowledge of other language than her own), with their manifest unsuitability to each other, could have married, was a puzzle that we could not solve.

After breakfast we started to see the Torre del Filosofo and the Val del Bove. Crossing a desert of reddish-brown sand and ash, we came to a ruined cairn of masonry, which

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Nino pointed out as the Torre, but on attempting further explanation he broke down in his history. This erection derives its name from Empedocles of Agrigentum, the famed aspirant to godly rank who, it is said, frequented the spot; but it is more probably the ruins of a temple, or of a building erected in the time of the Emperor Hadrian, as the fragments denote work of that period.

A little further, and we were above the celebrated Val del Bove, another marvel of volcanic creation. We stood on the brink of a precipice four thousand feet high. Below was a chasm four miles wide and more than double that length, shut in by black cliffs. On its floor, at unequal distances, were scattered cones of past eruptions. Innumerable streams of lava wound through the waste of ashes and rocks, which were piled in reckless confusion. Not a vestige of green, not a sign of life. It was a scene the unique desolation and awful solitude of which oppressed and fascinated at the same moment. We were silent, and even the

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garrulity of the Frenchman was checked by the solemnity of the scene.

Passing over the Piano del Lago, called so because water formed from winter snows formerly was here, we looked into the *cisterna*, a natural depression in the soil 120 feet deep, and constantly increasing in depth—a curiosity to some, perhaps, but not of great interest to us who had come fresh from the crater. Lower down we joined the mules that Giuseppe had laden with our belongings.

Arriving at Nicolosi, we said farewell to good-tempered Nino and our fellow-travellers, and reached Catania as the first drops of a heavy downpour which terminated the tropical Sicilian summer, came splashing down on the pavements.

That evening, passing to my bedroom, I saw Giuseppe at work cleaning his lantern. "Does your Excellency regret your excursion?" he asked. "Certainly not," replied I, "for I hope some day to repeat it." "Buon riposo," said he. "Altrettanto," I rejoined, as I shut my door.

**TWO BRIGANDS
OF ETNA**

TWO BRIGANDS OF ETNA

"*FINALMENTE*" was the word on many lips when news of the death of Placido Botta and Angelo Scarpa, the brigands, was carried through the country. "At last!" it was said, with a sigh of relief. Vengeance had tarried a long time, but it had come. Things human move slowly in Sicily; things official move slower still. But retribution surely comes in some shape or form in the end, and Botta and Scarpa met their doom within two days on the slopes of Etna.

Sicily and Sardinia—those two jewels in the crown of Italy—have always had an unenviable reputation on account of brigandage. They have scarcely yet outlived that reputation. Although the deeply contrived acts of organized brigandage of old are rarely met

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with now, it would be difficult to state that that form of crime has been eradicated; nor will it be until the people show a fixed determination to help the authorities in its extinction. However, the ordinary traveller runs no risk if he have the wisdom to keep his movements a secret, and so give no opportunity to evil-disposed persons to arrange for his capture and detention, since a *sequestro*, as it is called, is not a thing of the moment, but a deed to be thought out beforehand and carefully organized, because many people have a hand in it.

What is generally the beginning of a band of brigands? A thrust of a knife or a shot of a gun in anger or revenge, and the aggressor leaves his victim dead, betaking himself to the hills to avoid the consequences of his crime. He is soon joined by others in the same predicament as himself, and they begin depredations together. Other crimes follow, for brigands have prestige to keep up, like finer folk, and unless they be held in fear

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they do not obtain what is necessary for their subsistence. They often become desperate and very daring.

Brigands appear suddenly, like mushrooms after a shower of rain ; no one knows exactly where and how. They are here to-day and there to-morrow. One day they are united to do some foul deed ; another they are peacefully following some ordinary occupation, if not too hardly pressed by the police. Many are well armed with repeating rifles, and are equally well mounted. And they pass from place to place like the wind. Few of the peasant class will betray them if they happen to be seen on their rapid journeys. The peasants fear them, but have not the courage to oppose them ; they are content to sacrifice their belongings to appease their unwelcome visitors, in the hope of saving their lives. There are also an undercurrent of sympathy for evil-doing and a dislike to be thought to be allied with the authorities ; the result of the state of semi - civilization in which the country

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people live. But the backbone of brigandage in Sicily, and the great difficulties the police have to face, are to be found in that lamentable want of grit to openly protect themselves, and the conspiracy of silence which the Sicilian *contadini* show in most of their doings in life.

That is the reason why Botta and Scarpa had been so long at large. Despite the fear inspired by their names, there was nothing in the lives of the two men to raise them to the picturesque heights of the brigands of romance, or even of comic opera. They were nothing but evil-looking specimens of the criminal class, whose deeds more than surpassed the evil of their looks.

Scarpa was a young man of twenty-three, the brother of a noted brigand undergoing a term of thirty years' imprisonment. Botta was some years older. Both were born at a town on Mount Etna better known for the ferocity of the inhabitants than for anything else. Scarpa took to the open country ;

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joined a band of outlaws to avenge himself the better on those who had assisted in handing his brother over to justice. His sanguinary nature soon asserted itself in an encounter with the *Carabinieri*. This was followed by the cold-blooded murder of an overseer, into whose body he fired seven bullets in the presence of peasants too terrified to offer resistance. Crime followed crime in quick succession, and the country was in a state of alarm at the audacity of the companions in murder, who had become inseparable. So great was the awe which they inspired, that they went one day into a field where many men were working, and selecting one, named Carmelo, against whom they had no grudge, they took him up to a rocky eminence, where all might see the tragedy, and riddled the man with bullets. The deed accomplished, the murderers called out, "Go, tell the magistrate that Scarpa and Botta have killed Carmelo." It was done out of pure brutality, in order to terrorize the neighbourhood.

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The next victim was a *Carabiniere*, who, separated from his companion in attempting to find a lost path on the mountain, came on the brigands unawares, and was immediately shot dead. But the most bloodthirsty of all the deeds done by these human monsters was the murder of a well-to-do farmer whom they had captured. He had incurred their displeasure by refusing their blackmailing demands, and was suspected of working for their arrest. Unable to obtain the sum of twelve thousand lire demanded for a ransom—two thousand was offered and taken—the farmer was put to death. “We shall gouge out your eyes that have recognized us, and cut out your tongue that has spoken of us,” said they; and they put their threat into execution, finally disembowelling the body and throwing it into a river.

It may seem strange that such ruffians should have been at large, defying the law for more than three years. But to the difficulties already mentioned, which the police

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have to overcome, should be added those caused by large tracts of uninhabited country and the facilities for hiding afforded by the slopes of Etna. Fissures and caves of great size exist under the lava, and a man may sometimes disappear suddenly from sight and be seen no more. A single individual from behind the rocks is able to check the usual patrol of two or four of the public force should he have a repeating rifle, as nearly all brigands have. The first and foremost cause of the mischief, however, is the present penal code, from which capital punishment is excluded, and which is both contemptibly weak in its provisions and frequently miserably administered. This, joined with a silly sentimentality that has a sneaking fondness for evildoers, which pervades some classes of the community, and a want of moral fibre to put down lawlessness at all costs, leave a beautiful island under a heavy curse.

The two brigands of whom I write met

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their end thus. Information came to the head of the detective force that they were in hiding at a certain spot on Etna. That official called his men and went in search. The party passed a house where some women laughed at them, and scoffingly wished them success in their undertaking. The house was that of Scarpa, and the women were his mother and sisters. "Those who laugh to-day may weep to-morrow," was the detective's calm remark as he and his men went their way. They found Botta alone. He fired on them. The shots failed to take effect, and the police returned the fire. Botta received a bullet through the head that killed him instantly.

At some distance a man was seen coming out of a cave. It was Scarpa. He made good his escape, only to fall a victim two days later. The saying that good comes from thieves falling out was once more verified on this occasion. It seems that the younger brigand was enamoured of a low-class woman of his native place, and, in fact, was in the

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midst of love passages when surprised by the *Carabinieri* who compassed his death. Botta, a woman-hater, distrustful of the sex, who had always remonstrated against the amorous disposition of his companion, protested emphatically against his conduct, foreseeing ruin to both ; and he finally put into execution his threat of separation, and withdrew into a neighbouring cave. Thus it was that Botta was found alone and became an easy prey to the police.

The end of Scarpa was more tragic. Flying in hot haste over the lava streams, with the black crater of the mountain soaring many thousand feet above him, he went to one of his old haunts, where food and shelter were to be had—a shepherd's hut at the foot of one of the many extinct cones of the volcano. He knew it well, and the descendant of Daphnis who tended the flocks had always been a character too docile to be anything but friendly. But he counted without due reckoning. The shepherd, now exasperated by the

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constant demands for food and ravages on his flock, and probably hoping for the reward which all the world knew was placed on the brigand's head, resolved on his destruction. Setting his unwelcome guest to skin a rabbit for his dinner—an operation requiring some attention, as he knew—the shepherd, advancing stealthily from behind, severed the bent head of the brigand from his body with a strong, quick blow of an axe.

The body was taken to the cemetery, where it was visited by hundreds. Among the onlookers were the weeping womenfolk of Scarpa's family who had jeered at the detective officer and the task which he had set himself to do two days before.

"The weeping has come sooner than I anticipated," said the official to a companion as he left the cemetery, followed by the sullen glances and sobs of the dead brigand's family.

**SICILIAN
WAYS**

SICILIAN WAYS

VARIOUS and curious are the manners and customs of Ragusa and its vicinity. The people are well-behaved and religious in the sense of observing the outward forms of religion. "Silenzio nella Casa di Dio" were appropriate words in large letters seen on entering the principal church of the upper town; and the precept appeared as seemly in theory as it was doubtless necessary in the chattering land of Sicily. But far from the prescribed "Silence in the House of God," a din discordant as of a parrot-house in a zoological garden prevailed. The holy building was given up to the infant school of many classes, each collected before various side altars to say lessons of repetition of any but a religious kind.

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Much polite ceremonial holds in daily life among the lower orders (the upper classes considerably overdo it), and in no way is it better demonstrated than by the studied courtesy with which different grades of society address one another, and in the way that distinctive titles are bestowed. For example, *Massaru*, contracted into *Massa'*, belongs to the peasants who are well-to-do, to overseers, or to those who have any one under them. *Ziu*, or *Zu*, belongs of a right to labourers; and *Curatulu* is the distinctive appellation of all kinds of herdsman. The term *Gnura*, or *Gna* (abbreviation of Signora), is given to wives of farmers or artisans, and to those known to possess means of their own, or who hold positions of trust; while *Zia*, or *Za*, belongs to the better class of labourers' wives. Women of lower grade have no special designation, but their names are changed or contracted to the diminutive in sign of respect or affection: from Giuseppina to Pippuzza or Peppina, from Francesca to Ciccuzza or Ciccia,

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from Antonina to Nina. Peasants address strangers as *Compari* or *Commari*, thus politely, putting them on terms of equality with themselves; and a man who is godfather to a child becomes "*compare*" to the parents—a relationship which in some parts of Sicily is accounted almost equal to that of brother. Of late years the dignity of *Don* and *Donna*, which in old times was enjoyed only by children of the sovereign or of dukes and princes by right, is bestowed indiscriminately on folk of humbler origin.

There are various picturesque forms of salutation, such as "*Biniricitu*" (*Benedicite*) from the younger to the older, to which the reply is "*Santu*" or "*Vi saluto*," or "*Salute vi vogghiu*" (*I wish you health*). When a peasant meets a stranger from a distant village, he says in passing, "*Gesù e Maria*," to which the invariable answer is "*San Giuseppe v'accompagni*" (*May St. Joseph be your guide!*). In taking leave, people say "*Cuvirnativi*" (*Take care of yourself*), and

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the rejoinder is " Raccumannatamì u Signuri " (Commend me to the Lord). Before knocking at a door the person mutters " Ddorazia " (Deo gratias), and the owner from within answers " Trasiti cui siti " (Enter freely, whoever you are). The good manners of the humblest Sicilian peasant are noteworthy, and might serve not only as examples for our own lower classes, but also to some of the younger persons of both sexes who frequent the drawing-rooms of so-called Society.

Another custom observed in the neighbourhood takes place on the Vigil of the Purification of the Virgin, when peasant women of Chiaramonte go to a mountain above the town to bathe their hands and faces in dew. As soon as dawn breaks they are seen on their way to the mountain, solemnly reciting the Rosary of the Madonna and chanting in chorus ; and, again, each one for herself, a special hymn of praise in honour of the Virgin and of the spotless purity of the dew, which alone may be compared to her. After the

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hymn is finished, the women kneel and bury their hands in grass and flowers wet with dew, making the sign of the cross first on their foreheads and then on their breasts and lips, reciting meanwhile the Ave in subdued and prayerful monotone.

Possibly none are so superstitious as the Sicilians. The *Mal'occhio*, or Evil Eye, is a living terror as well as a power ; and fairies and gnomes, monsters and evil spirits, dreams and prognostications, enter largely into their lives. Dreams, especially those of a Monday or Tuesday, are held to be divine revelations, for, say the people, God lifts a corner of the veil that hides the future, giving man time and opportunity whereby to avoid misfortune, or prepare with Christian resignation to face what that future may have in store. To dream of white grapes means tears ; of black grapes, fecundity ; of black figs, souls in purgatory who loudly call for prayers to help them ; of white figs, misfortune ; of a black dog visiting a house, a sign of a special providence or

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good luck ; of a white dog, theft or loss. Here the ancient superstition still holds, for black is regarded as a lucky colour and white as unlucky, which is contrary to the belief of modern times. Pears presage castigation ; wheat, torment ; raw meat, approaching death ; intestines or roasted meat, a violent death. A hen and chickens in one's dream signify treasure trove ; a visit from a priest good fortune, and so on.

The people of Ragusa are known for their kindness to animals—an admirable trait that might well be imitated throughout Italy and Sicily. The proverb, “ Meglio prestare la moglie che l'asino ” (Better lend your wife than your donkey) finds apt illustration in the following tale :—

A peasant woman, seeing her donkey very ill, went in search of the blacksmith, who is frequently the only veterinary surgeon available. The latter, however, said that nothing but a miracle could save the beast. Seized with the hope of preserving its precious life,

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the woman hastened to the church, and before the altar of St. Erasmus, the special protector of asses in the Sicilian hierarchy of Heaven, in a passionate flow of words and tears vowed the following vow, which has been put into Sicilian verse thus :

Aiu un fanciullinu ed un bbarduinu sulu.
Lassatimi lu sceccu ca nu campa
E pighiativi scanciu la fighiulu,
Ca ppi tri ggjorni v'addumu na lampa.¹

The relations of the Sicilians to their patron saints are peculiar. A friend has related that, being somewhat shocked at seeing a woman in a church not only vilifying and shaking her fist at, but also spitting in the face of a statue of a saint, remonstrated on her behaviour with a priest standing near. "Oh," said the priest, "don't think too much of that; after all is said, the poor woman is right. She has prayed night and day for

¹ I have only a son and a donkey : leave me the donkey which brings me bread ; take in exchange my son ; for this favour I vow a candle to you for three days.

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her son who is ill, and has also vowed many gifts to the saint, without result. She is not to blame."

Again, many an image of the patron saint of a town has been locked up in a dark cupboard in dire disgrace, or carried through the streets tied on a donkey's back with his face to the tail, to be pelted with refuse and mud because prayers for rain or other favours have remained ungranted. The Sicilians are practical in their ideas, and look for the *quid pro quo*, though they are not always as ready to give it when gratitude or politeness demand it from them.

The people possess a sense of satirical humour, and they do not spare their neighbours, especially those who live in adjoining towns. Personal remarks, though often offensive and coarse, are full of facetious wit ; in the last respect resembling those of the Irish, with whom these people have points in common. For example, the women of Palagonia are called canaries because, being

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victims of malaria, their faces are yellow. The epithet of "burners of men" still attaches to the inhabitants of Militello because, much to the indignation of the rest of Sicily, they wisely burned the corpses of those who died of the plague. An old chronicle says that the people of a certain town were called *carpusi* (thieves), a name still retained because they are "not very honest"; and the same people go by the name of sharks because they have large heads. Men of Buccheri are nicknamed "empty saddle-bags," because they are very poor.

The last day of Carnival is the great day of the year in the family circle. No master refuses leave of absence to his servant, who, if unmarried, journeys many miles to dine under the paternal roof. Grouped around the table, the family is gathered, and when the benediction of Heaven has been invoked by the father for himself and his kneeling wife and children, the meal of macaroni and savoury dishes of meat and vegetables is commenced

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solemnly and eaten in plenty and peace. Carnival is a time when old customs dating back many centuries are scrupulously observed. The last three days before Lent, chiefly given up to feasting, dancing, and merrymaking, are called *sdirruminica*, *sdirriluni*, *sdirrimarti* (*sdirri* is a corruption of the French *dernier*, and is a relic of the Angevin occupation). To these days belong the following proverbs in Sicilian dialect: "On the last Sunday make friends with nuns, since they prepare tasty dishes;" "On the last Monday, oranges in plenty;" "On the last Tuesday, to those who want give secretly, i.e. not to offend their feelings." And for the *sdirrisira*, or the last evening of all, you must dine with your own people, no matter where you may be at Christmas or Easter:

Natale e Pasqua ccu tu vuoi,
La sdirrisira falla con li tuoi.

There are also other days of Carnival observed here, such as the *Giovedì grasso*,

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and its two preceding Thursdays, which have their special denominations, one being *il giorno dello Zuppiddu*, which is derived from Silenus, who was supposed to be *zoppo*, or lame, on which day a distribution of macaroni is made to the poor. On *Giovedì grasso* (otherwise *di lu lardaloru*, because a special dish of bacon and vegetables of the name is eaten on that day), many a family quarrel finds a peaceful solution, because it is thought that the merits of that savoury dish is not fully appreciated by those partaking of it if ill-will or bitterness of feeling exist among them. Such quarrels are of frequent occurrence in a family, owing to conflicting interests, which arise as follows: When a peasant girl is of marriageable age, she must carry a dowry to her husband, otherwise she has little hope of leaving the paternal roof. Besides her modest trousseau, the parents usually promise eight or ten pounds wherewith to buy a house, generally a miserable hut; of this only a small sum is paid down, the remainder is

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declared due in various instalments every Christmas-time. As, however, the family pig is frequently security for the dowry (as it is for the rent in Ireland), and as that important member of the household may happen to, and frequently does, die before its appointed time, or is surreptitiously disposed of to meet more urgent wants, all hopes of the dowry vanish and family dissensions begin. Then the indignant son-in-law takes matters into his own hands and his wife by the shoulders, and shows her the door, saying she can return when her dowry be paid. The no less outraged father seizes upon this insult to his house as a valid excuse for non-payment, and prefers to receive his daughter until fortune smiles upon his affairs once more.

Again, when a son is married (around Ragusa the sons receive dowries, which is not generally the case in Sicily), the father frequently assigns as a marriage portion *one foot* of a mule or horse, that is to say, a fourth

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part in the ownership or value of the animal. Unfortunately, it often happens that another foot has been already given away, to an elder brother, the other two remaining the property of the parent, or for further disposal to a third son of matrimonial intent. So the delicate question of how one animal is to be a source of income to three individuals arises (always understanding that the quadruped is neither a Derby winner nor a favourite steeplechaser, but a miserable beast of burden at best), and is hard to solve. Small wonder that differences of opinion on the subject should lead to a state of domestic friction, playing havoc with paternal love and filial affection. However, the succulent dish of *lu lardaloru* alluded to above, has magnetic power to draw the discordant family together, for it would be considered a scandalous breach of good manners on the part of a son or son-in-law to disregard the father's invitation and not let bygones be bygones in the savoury fumes of the favourite stew. Thus difficulties are dis-

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cussed and promises renewed with a geniality engendered by a full stomach; and the vexed question of the mule's foot is frequently compromised with the substitution of a gift of linen, and the defaulting pig is compensated by some other homely present.

But Carnival does not consist only of family gatherings and feasting. Practical jokes, jesting, mummary and licence, enter largely into the celebration of the season. Formerly gorgeous processions, like those in the Corso at Rome, were the favourite displays of the gentry, and large sums were expended on them. But these have ceased, as they have also ceased in the capital. Small mercy is shown to unpopular persons, and those who are known for any special failing or idiosyncrasy are not spared. A priest had often complained that the Pope had overlooked his merits, and disregarded his many virtues. One day he received a telegram from Rome, saying he had been nominated to a neighbouring bishopric, and he began to make costly

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preparations for betaking himself to his see, assuming all the airs and dignity of a prelate. But with the sackcloth and ashes of the first day of Lent came the disillusion, intended and arranged by the Carnival masqueraders, and their victim soon learnt that the Pope was still unmindful of his great merits and promotion as far off as ever.

Marriages between old people, or those of very different ages, seem always to have excited the ire of the lower classes of these parts; and woe betide the unhappy couple if they happen to select Christmas-time for the change from single blessedness to connubial bliss. An old man of Chiaramonte fell in love with and married a young woman privately, in the hope of escaping notice. But alas for his hopes! On the evening of the wedding-day a crowd collected, and, making a hole in the door of the one-roomed house, thrust in bundles of lighted straw which filled it with smoke. But, though the loving pair were well-nigh choked, they re-

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fused to open to their enemies. Whereupon the crowd, seeing that their fun was likely to be baffled, broke down the door and carried off Philemon and Baucis in triumph. The unfortunate bride and bridegroom were tied to ladders, hoisted on the shoulders of men and boys, and escorted through the town. The night was a dark one, but the darkness was soon overcome by a hundred torches, and an extraordinary sight it was. The procession was preceded by men improvising music from horns, tambourines, petroleum cans, and whistles ; wherever it passed, doors and windows were thrown open, and there was a perpetual chorus of songs and shouting, accompanied by every sort of missile that came to hand, some not of the most delicate description. The mob had its own way because it was Carnival-time ; and the authorities joined in the revelry.

Such proceedings are only possible at this particular season of the year, however, for at other times, though ready for any amusement

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and keenly alive to any fun that may be going on around them, in which they love to participate, the people are orderly and well-behaved, and there is an absence of horse-play and rough treatment of strangers which one would like to notice in other countries. Warm-hearted and affectionate the Sicilian lower classes certainly are. They have many and deep-seated faults, which will probably take long years to remedy, owing to the oppression of centuries, ignorance, and striving against exacting and ever-changing masters from time immemorial. But there is much to encourage a hopeful view of their future, and the belief that they may some day be worthy, in all senses of the word, of the beautiful land of sun and warmth of which they are the proud possessors, may still be indulged in by their many well-wishers.

**SYRACUSE
HONOURS
ÆSCHYLUS**

SYRACUSE HONOURS ÆSCHYLUS

MODERN Syracuse, knowing as little of Æschylus as the rest of the world, because scanty is the knowledge of his life that history imparts, has nevertheless busied itself in honouring the "Father of Greek Tragic Drama." But Syracuse, more than another town of to-day, has a right to honour him. It was this city, and its sister Gela, that received him when the citizens of his native Athens had driven him to foreign shores. They treated him as an honoured guest, and combined to give him sumptuous burial. Syracuse, indeed, claimed him as its own then; and to-day his memory is one of its delights to honour.

Those who know Italy cannot have failed to notice the pride of the people in the history

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of its greatness. Patriotism with them is not a feeble expression of opinion, or a dormant sentiment, but a living force to inspire and stimulate ; to restrain within just limits those who threaten disaster to their country by inept theories in the hope of place and profit. Their deeper love of country was not born from the grandeur of Imperial Rome, as some might think ; but from a remoter past, when the finer instincts and perception of men were awakened by noble achievements of hero, poet, and sculptor.

The memory of those achievements is vividly present with Italians now. The recollection is as much part of their life as of their history. Those who would understand the Italians must take account of that love of and pride in the past.

Syracuse having had a prominent part in the making of history, is imbued with the national sentiment. It still glories in the remembrance of its famous days. Here Gelon, after his victory at Himera, initiated

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the golden era of Greek supremacy in Sicily ; here his brother Hiero reared that city which evoked Cicero's unstinted admiration, receiving at his court the great poets of the age, of whom Æschylus was one. Here, also, Nicias, the intrepid besieger, was finally defeated and brought prisoner from Asinarus, thus anticipating the fall of Athens ; and from here the first Dionysius carried the limits of Syracusan territory triumphantly to the greater part of Sicily and to Magna Græcia. Here, too, the second Hiero rescued the land from conflict to restore prosperity and peace ; and, later, the city became a cradle of Christianity and, at one time, the seat of the Byzantine Empire.

With the exception of its capital, no town of the Roman Empire has played so important a part in the world's story. So it is right that Syracuse should celebrate the past, and in reviving old memories, recall the famous days of Greek culture and the share it has had in promoting it. To Cavaliere Mario Gargallo and his indefatigable companions be

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attributed all praise, not only for the hard work voluntarily undertaken, but also for having initiated this celebration in honour of the past.

Padua, Venice, Vicenza, Trieste, Milan, and Rome have recently witnessed performances of the works of Euripides and Aristophanes. Now Syracuse has wished to follow their example. It has produced "Agamemnon," first of that Trilogy "The Oresteia," which has been described as the "highest achievement, not only of Æschylus, but probably of all Greek Drama."

As has been said, little is known of the life of Æschylus; but this much is related. Born in 525 B.C., his father was Euphorion, an Athenian, from the deme of Eleusis. His home was, therefore, not only the seat of the solemn mysteries of the "Great Mother," Demeter, but also of the cult of Dionysus. The ceremonials of the latter may have influenced the impressionable mind of the young poet, inasmuch as Drama was evolved

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by him from the Dithyramb, a hymn about divine or heroic persons, and especially connected with the worship of Dionysus.

The creation of Drama from the Dithyramb, which Aristotle with certainty attributes to Æschylus, may be recalled. Dithyrambs, first mentioned by Archilochus 670 B.C., were sung at Corinth by a chorus of fifty persons. Such choruses, representing Satyrs, attendants of the "wandering god," were features of the Dionysia at Athens. Thespis of Icaria, in Attica, introduced the first innovation. He wrote a dithyrambic chorus of Satyrs of which he appointed a leader, who held dialogue with another person, not with the chorus only, as before. That person was called "upocrites," or explainer (which became afterwards the word for actor: hence hypocrite, or simulator). Comment and narrative were thus introduced; but as yet there was no Drama. To Thespis succeeded Phrynichus, famed "for the simple sweetness of his lyrics," described by Aristophanes

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as "native wood-notes wild," as if the birds had taught him their song. He extended the Satyr chorus. Æschylus took the third and most important step. He introduced a second actor, thus giving greater importance to dialogue, diminishing that of the chorus. A story could now be told in action. Drama was created. The dictum of Aristotle on this subject may be accepted as conclusive, because, writing at Athens about 330 B.C., he had at his command the literature of the time and records of performances of the plays.

Æschylus is also credited with having first clothed actors in dresses suitable to the characters represented.

He devoted himself in early life to poetry. But the time in which he lived was warlike. Tragedy might be suggested, it is true, but the voice of a poet would be lost in the clamour of war.

Æschylus was known as a poet when twenty-five years old. At the age of thirty-five he laid aside the pen for the sword,

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at a call to arms in defence of his country against the Persians. He was one of the proud victors on the plains of Marathon. Again he fought at Salamis; and, later, at Plataea. At those battles he acquired the deeper knowledge of the sufferings of mankind which were to find so noble an expression in his tragedies. Thus on the stage he was able to impart to the presentation of incidents connected with the Athenian wars of independence a simplicity and nobleness which experience alone could give.

He gained his first laurels as a poet 484 B.C., having been defeated eighteen years before by a man many years his junior, Sophocles of Colonos, who then gained the earliest of his victories. The position of Æschylus as poet in Athens seems to have been paramount from that date.

The following year he secured the prize with "The Seven Against Thebes." His last victory was obtained in 458 for "The Oresteia."

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Favourite though he was, and greatly, as his work was acclaimed at Athens, difficulties arose which induced Æschylus to leave his native land for Sicily. Various causes have been assigned, more or less vaguely, for this self-imposed banishment. Whether it was the invitation of Hiero, the enlightened ruler of Syracuse, who aspired to make his people lovers of the highest form of art by a close study of our poet's tragedies; whether Æschylus, disappointed once more in obtaining a prize that was offered for poetry in honour of the heroes of Marathon, which fell not to him but to Simonides; or to a disagreement with his fellow-countrymen, who declared that their women and children had been frightened with disastrous consequences by the stirring performance of his "Eumenides"; or whether, again, because the poet had been attacked for the freedom of thought openly expressed in his works, which varied from the accepted forms of belief—is matter for conjecture.

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It is sufficient to note here that Æschylus was adopted by the Syracusans as their own, Macrobius going so far as to call him "a true Sicilian." It is said that either to please his hosts, or from intimate association, he introduced Sicilian idioms into his verse.

To gratify his patron, Hiero, on the occasion of the foundation of the city first named Ætna (afterwards Katané), upon which the Syracusan ruler greatly prided himself, Æschylus wrote "The Women of Ætna," first performed at Syracuse. It is likely, also, that "The Persians," the play which was an echo of Salamis, that "great national record of combined poetry and patriotism," as it was also the first account of a great piece of history by a great poet, who had himself helped to make the history, rendering it, perhaps, unique in literature," had also there its first public representation. How long he remained in Sicily at that time is doubtful; but certainly for three or four years. When he returned to Athens, it is related, some of his

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tragedies provoked so great an animosity, that he was brought to trial for impiety, or for divulging sacred mysteries. He was saved by his brother, who enforced a strong pleading on his behalf by uncovering before the judges his arm, the hand of which had been cut off at Salamis.

He returned to Sicily after the death of Hiero, and resided at Gela, where he died in 456 B.C., in the sixty-ninth year of his age.

The alleged manner of his death may be recalled, not as a matter of history, but as an indication of the love of the Greeks to attribute miraculous deaths to their famous men. Æschylus was asleep in the fields about Gela when an eagle soared into the air with a tortoise in its claws. The bird, seeing the bald head of the poet shining below in the sun, mistook it for a rock, and dropped the tortoise to break its shell. The tortoise fell on the poet's head and killed him. The origin of the fable, perhaps, is not difficult

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to trace. It has been suggested that the bird of Zeus, the eagle, carrying heavenward a shell of a tortoise, might be the sign of apotheosis of a poet, inasmuch as lyres were partly constructed from tortoiseshell. Such would be an indication of immortality. Possibly Sicilian humour was not altogether absent when the tale was repeated by the poet's unfriendly critics. The rock, the bald head, and the fall of the tortoise, may have been added by them to the story.

Legend was also attached to the youthful days of Æschylus. It was maintained that Dionysius appeared to him in a vineyard at Eleusis with a command to dedicate himself to tragedy. Legend also clung to the manner of his death. It was an inevitable outcome of the godlike qualities attributed to him by his friends. The oracle that had foretold a sudden death also may have prompted the picturesque fable of the eagle and its prey.

The people of Gela, guarding his bones

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jealously, erected a monument to the poet, inscribing thereon lines written by himself :—

Æschylus, Euphorion's son, an Athenian, lies here
Asleep, the fertile soil of Gela covering him.
The fields of Marathon bear witness to his valour
Which the long-haired Mede encountered.

An unusual honour was paid to his memory at Athens, a special law being passed for the performance of his plays after death.

A bronze statue of him was erected in the theatre of Lycurgus in that city.

Though so little is known of the life of Æschylus, much has been written about his works. Fragments, of which 451 are said to exist, seem to prove that seventy-eight—some say ninety—dramas were composed by him. Of these dramas only seven remain intact: "The Suppliant Women," "Prometheus Bound," "The Persians," "The Seven Against Thebes," and the Trilogy referred to, "The Oresteia," in which are included "The Agamemnon," "The Libation Bearers," and "The Furies."

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Trilogies, which were three tragedies, chiefly connected in subject, forming, as it were, three chapters of one story (followed by a Satyr play which completed a Tetralogy), were well suited to the vivid imagination of Æschylus, "who loved to express character by great strokes of action and to trace a gradual Nemesis to some goal of divine reconciliation."

The only complete Trilogy that remains, "The Oresteia," surpasses any other effort of the poet. It has been described as possessing "all the splendour of language and the lyrical magic of the early plays, the old, the almost superhuman grandeur of outline, while it is as sharp and deep in character and drawing, as keenly dramatic as the finest work of Sophocles." ¹

Of "Prometheus Bound" the same critic says "the subject is Titanic, but it has produced in the hands of Æschylus and of Shelley two of the greatest of mankind's

¹ Gilbert Murray.

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dramatic poems." Another writer¹ calls it "an immortal masterpiece of creative imagination."

Æschylus' first play, "The Suppliant Women," has been likened to "one of those archaic statues which stand with limbs stiff and countenance smiling and strong . . . a most quaint and beautiful work."

"The Seven Against Thebes" was a third in another Trilogy, and gives an account of the Theban siege. It was greatly admired by antiquity. Aristophanes calls it "a play full of Ares that made every one who saw it fierce with the wish to be a fiery foe."

Of "The Furies" it has already been said that its vivid scenes and terrors put to too great a strain the nerves of the women and children of Athens.

A comparison between the known works of that supreme constellation in the Greek poetic firmament, the immortal Triad, Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, who were famed

¹ R. D. Archer-Hind.

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above others for its development, is of interest in connection with the Greek Drama. What Æschylus originated in the development of Tragedy, Sophocles and Euripides amplified. Sophocles, according to Plato, spoke of his own style as "having passed through three successive phases. In the first he had imitated the majesty, the pomp of Æschylus. The second was marked by incisiveness of style. The third by the diction most expressive of character, fittest to make the persons of drama seem real. . . . Æschylus. was a great creator, Sophocles pre-eminently a great artist, who invests the conception of the popular religion with a higher spiritual and intellectual meaning. There is power joined to purity of taste, self-restraint, and a sure instinct of symmetry." ¹

Euripides, who was sixteen years younger than Sophocles, began his career at the age of twenty-five, a year after Æschylus died. "His genius was at discord with the form

¹ Richard Jebb.

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in which he worked. He found the primary condition of tragedy fixed ; he had the heroic legends for material to work upon. . . . *Æschylus* and *Sophocles* had felt, each in his own way, that the treatment must be ideal, that a certain nobleness must be preserved to the persons of the heroic saga. *Euripides* broke this convention by often making his persons the exponents of modern subtleties, sometimes of his own thoughts, sometimes by realism in the treatment of the myth. He brought in new elements of romance and melodrama. Certain thoughts on religion, conduct, and society pervade his work. His human pathos has a universal appeal. He is, as *Aristotle* says, " the most moving of poets." In language he is an excellent artist, who can veil his art. He was the idol of later antiquity ; and is the favourite of countless modern readers, who care less for the ideal drama of *Æschylus* and *Sophocles*." ¹

This is a brief story of the Greek Drama

¹ Richard Jebb.

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from the days of Æschylus to those of Euripides. During that period of about a century it underwent a change which, except for the scenic decoration on the stage, has scarcely been seen between then and now.

Among those who were honoured at Syracuse, either in person or in their work, Epicharmus must be remembered. If Æschylus was the Father of Greek Tragedy, Greek Comedy may claim parentage from Epicharmus. Plato called him "the Prince of Comedy." However much he may have been influenced by Aristoxenus of Selinus, the comic poet who lived shortly before him, the younger was certainly the greater man. Though not probably a Sicilian by birth, he lived with his father Elotales at Megara from the early age of three, between 550 and 460 B.C. Thence he went to Syracuse, where, it is said, a play written by him was given when he was but six years old.

Sicily was a fruitful field for the development of comedy, owing to the character of

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the inhabitants. The Sicilians possessed then, as they possess now, the reputation of being sharp-witted, of a lively temperament, loquacious, also, and facetious even in adversity. In short, they were Greeks, who, transplanted to a soil much superior to their own in richness, developed more rapidly the gifts with which Nature had endowed them. Even in their religious choruses and observances they introduced facetious remarks. They were fond of dancing. It is stated that Andros of Katané introduced the dance while accompanying himself on the tibia. Dancing, together with the art of cooking, has survived from Greek days as chief of Sicilian accomplishments. The reputation of Epicharmus was enhanced by being a philosopher and a pupil of Pythagoras. It is said he wrote thirty-six comedies, of which only fragments remain. What is known of his work, which deals largely with mythological subjects, gives lively descriptions of life in Sicily at his time.

Nor is the list of renowned poets and

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others whom Syracuse honoured ended with the above. Pindar of Thebes, Simonides of Cos, and his nephew Bacchylides, besides its own distinguished sons, Sophron, whose compositions, it is said, were read with rapture by Plato, and Theocritus, the inventor of yet another form of poetry, the idyllic pastoral singer of all time, were hailed with respect and held in reverence by the people, who gloried in their talents and their fame. Plato was three times at Syracuse. Xenophanes, founder of the Eleatic School, followers of Zeno, the sturdy philosopher, died there. Empedocles walked the streets of the city, coming from neighbouring Acragas; while Archimedes, Hicetas, and Lycias were born there.

To return to Æschylus. His features have come down to posterity in marble, possibly reproduced from his bronze statue which stood in the theatre built by Lycurgus. The bust presents the poet in advanced middle age, the head bare, the chin thickly bearded, a nose

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delicately shaped, a firm mouth, brows sloping to the nose over deeply inset eyes. The face bespeaks a resolution that does not mar a singularly placid beauty. Notwithstanding, it is said that when he composed his countenance betrayed the greatest ferocity.

If little be known of the details of his life, much of his nature may be gathered from his writings. It is certain that first and foremost he prided himself on being a "Warrior of Marathon." That has been seen in the epitaph written by himself. Therein he makes no mention of his transcendent merits as a poet. He meekly calls his work "crumbs from the great Homeric table." He wishes the fields of Marathon alone to speak to his fame. It may be that he, as a deep thinker, was aware of the superiority of action to a passive life; that heroic deeds must always count before words; that the whole world of literature is as nothing compared with the physical achievements of a hero. Or it may be, again, that the joy of a Patriot, who has

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striven successfully for his country on the field of battle, makes all other worldly exploits of little consequence.

His writings show a profound veneration for justice, a certainty of retribution for crime, as well as a belief in the transmission of evil. He denies that the Divine Power is a jealous God—that the Deity delights in troubling mankind.

Æschylus was no polytheist. He did not share the religious opinions of his day. In anguish he cried, "I am alone in my thought." Seeking consolation, he substitutes a sublime doctrine of justice. He was no rationalist, no agnostic to question supernatural forces. In short, Æschylus stood at a stage "where it still seems possible to reconcile the main scheme of traditional theology with morality and reason. The man 'who prays to Zeus, whoe'er he be,' who avows 'there is no power I can find, though I sink my plummet through all being, except only Zeus, if I would, in very truth, cast off this aimless

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burden of my heart,' is a long way from Pindaric polytheism'. He tries more definitely to grope his way to Zeus as a Spirit of Reason, as opposed to the blind Titan forms of Hesiodic legend." ¹

" His style is reflective, in a way, suggesting a deeply brooding mind, tinged with mysticism, grappling with dark problems of life and fate."

He welcomed moral nobleness. He resented the drift towards wrong and selfish folly which he saw around him. In his love of liberty is found that spirit recorded by Herodotus, which " had made Athens rise from a commonplace Ionian state to be the model and leader of Hellas."

Such was the hero chosen by the Syracusans to receive special honour by the revival of one of his most famous tragedies with all the solemnity and artistic care that man can bestow.

The place selected is that Theatre where countless thousands have listened to the great

¹ Gilbert Murray.

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plays of antiquity, from earliest times—a place alive with memories. Around are the same rocks, which echoed the sonorous words of tragedy, the quips and fancies of comedy. Here was Greek Drama cradled and cherished. Here tears were shed and laughter pealed as the lines of Æschylus and Sophocles, of Sophron and Epicharmus were poured into eager ears. Here rang out the words of Euripides, the plaint of the Trojan women, the beauty of which so moved their Syracusan conquerors that the Athenian prisoners, slowly starving to death, gained tardy deliverance from bondage in the fateful quarries.¹

Begun some time in the days of Hiero, who reigned from 478 to 467 B.C., and perhaps on the site of an older structure, this wonderful Theatre was designed by Myrilla ; but it could not have been finished until many years later. The first mention of it was in 406. Hollowed in the rock, it had sixty rows of seats, rising one above the other in gentle slope. It seated

¹ "Tales of Old Sicily."

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some twenty-four thousand spectators. The seats were divided into nine sections, each with its title of dedication : to Olympian Zeus and Herakles among the gods ; to Hiero ; to Philistis his wife, whose name may yet be read engraven on the stone ; to Nereis, daughter of Pyrrhus, King of Epirus, wife of Gelon, the son of Hiero. The eleven lower rows of seats were covered with white marble.

Of the Greek stage, here as elsewhere, little is either seen or known. It has been destroyed beyond power to reconstruct. And little is known of the architectural adornments. Probably a Corinthian portico stood in the upper part ; and probably, some day, may be brought to light the site of the Mouseion, or House of the Dramatic Artists, which surely stood hard by. But in and about the Theatre mystery lurks ; and conjecture only can avail to lift a portion of its veil.

The Greek Theatre in the oldest times had the simplest of beginnings ; the growth of it was slow. The choric dances in honour of

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Dionysus, forerunners of the drama, were held in the open air at any convenient spot, generally in or near his sacred precincts. When an actor was introduced, he mounted on a table, or a cart, to be visible to the surrounding spectators over the heads of the Chorus. To that succeeded a low platform or stage. There was also a booth used as a dressing and property room at the back. The site chosen would be preferably on the side of a hill, so that the spectators could see and hear. "Such were the essential parts of a Greek theatre at all periods, though they received later a permanent and elaborate architectural form."

The first structures were of wood, probably temporary. It is related that when Æschylus and others were competing at Athens in 499 B.C., the wooden structure gave way. The most celebrated plays we know were first given in temporary or unfinished theatres. Stone-built theatres in a completed state were seen much later.

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Although no remains of the early Greek stage arrangements exist anywhere, in all the theatres alike there was an oblong building, the skéné, at least two stories high, in front of which was a platform carried by a row of columns, called the proskenion, usually about twelve feet high and ten feet broad. The top of the platform was approached by three doors leading through the walls of the skéné; it was also accessible at each end by a ramp, or by steps.

Later a permanent building was erected at the back of the skéné, before which the action of the play took place. This served for the scenery of every play. Although Sophocles is said to have been the first to employ the art of the scene-painter, in his time, and for very long after, the painted scenery on canvas known to-day did not exist. That for which Agatharchus was famed was probably a kind of architectural perspective, which gave way to solid architecture later. Much conjecture, argument and disagreement have arisen in

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regard to the scenic arrangements of the stage in Greek times. But there were "movable platforms, a sort of crane for hoisting persons representing the deities and others into the air; also a high platform for the appearance of the gods."

The Theatre at Syracuse became a stone quarry in the Middle Ages; the stones of the stage were taken to construct the fortifications of the modern town. In Roman times, to witness the agony of men and animals dying in the arena was preferred to the brave deeds extolled by the poets—the Theatre was forsaken for the Amphitheatre. The former was therefore abandoned, became a place of sepulchres and mural tablets—the spot which had seen so much fine tragedy, was the home of the dead, of flocks and herds, overgrown with weeds, a cascade of water flowing from ancient conduits and modern mill-wheels, with peasants profaning the seat of the Muses where a cultivated people had hung breathless on the inspired words of immortal poets.

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In our own time, men mindful of its history, proud of its associations, rescued the Theatre from its squalor, though they could not restore its altars, its marbles, and its statues. Perhaps it has gained in romance what it had lost in splendour. If no longer is seen Apollo's temple with its sacred precincts dominating the circling seats; if no longer stands below the altar of Dionysus round which the dancers rendered vocal homage to the god; if gone are the mighty temples of the Great Mother and her Daughter, of Herakles, seen once in the green plain hard by; yet Nature, by resuming her sway, has made compensation; and what is left is fair to look upon. Indeed, no drop scene so fair as this can ever have graced a playhouse, save those perhaps of Grecian build. Beyond the seats hewn in the grey rock, worn and scored, and beyond the broken stones of the stage, the eye wanders far, to rest on lemon groves, dotted with specks of yellow fruit growing to the borders of the bay; on Syracuse of to-day, the

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Ortygia of the past, where yet Athene's shrine dominates the town. It rests on the shining surface of the Harbour—once tinged with blood of sister lands, blue now as the colour of the sky—whose floor is strewn with spoil of Grecian galleys. Thence the eye wanders to the site of old Polichna, where two columns stand erect, sole vestiges of the mighty fane of Zeus which even Athenian greed refused to rob. Westward the eye still wanders to the plain where Cyane and Anapus flow gently to the bay; and further still to blue-grey mountains that fringe the sea against a sunset sky. Such is the curtain rung down by Nature on scenes evoked by men past and gone. And who can say the peaceful beauty of the spot may not rival the glory of long ago?

A solemn loneliness has held until recently. To-day all is changed for the honouring of Æschylus. The same are the grey rocks, the distant hills, the plain, the bay; but now the palace of Agamemnon rises on the right—a low, castellated structure with little ornament.

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In front is a portico on piers and columns, which stands at the head of a flight of steps. At the side is a square tower, where heralds passed their watchful nights "under the starry conclave of the midnight sky," looking for the flare of fires to give them notice of the fall of Troy. Before the palace is a courtyard of irregular shape, closed on the opposite side by a wall of stone with heavy parapet and frieze of archaic design, pierced in the centre by the gateway of Lions. The altar of Dionysus—true symbol of Greek drama—stands where it stood more than two thousand years ago. Other altars, two beside the entrance of the palace, are seen around, their fires alight to witness to the feigned piety of the House of Atreus.

Now history is repeated. Once more are the seats of the Theatre filled with spectators. Once again the audience hangs on spoken words. Now, as then, the actors' doings are of secondary import, the stirring lines, the tragic fate of the King, the deceit of his

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Queen, the misery of the captive prophetess, are what stirs the multitude to enthusiasm.

Happy is the choice of "The Agamemnon." No tragedy of Æschylus shows better the sublime force of the poet's greatness, especially in the speech of Clytemnestra when she welcomes the King, her husband; in the marvellous art of the episode of Cassandra, wherein "close inspection will show Æschylus at the very highest point of inspiration"; in the Choric odes, described as "the poet's profoundest musings on the moral and religious and historical problems presented by the story." ¹

The translation of the play into Italian by Professor Ettore Romagnoli—"poet, dramatist, musician, critic, philologist, and archæologist," as a friendly scribe calls him—has been in good hands. Difficult though it has been to preserve the grandiose, almost titanic Greek verse in the suave language of Italy, and more difficult still to do full

¹ E. D. A. Morshead.

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justice in blank verse to the original words, the attempt has served its purpose. Signor Romagnoli's many studies in Hellenistic writings and music have rendered him peculiarly suited to the task. He is evidently, no pedant, which is a happy thing. He considers that the classics "should be approached with the love of an artist, of a disciple, rather than from the critical standpoint of a philologist."

But this rendering fell short of expectation, especially in the more dramatic parts, where a closer adherence to the signification of the solemn lines of the original text would have given more satisfaction and imparted a greater solemnity to the performance. Signor Romagnoli's knowledge has been, however, of great service. Both in the music which he has composed, the costumes which he has designed from Greek vases, in the scenery, and in the "properties," he has adhered to Greek traditions. If some details of the performance have differed from the latter, it has been indispensable. It was not possible to present to a

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twentieth-century audience a play as acted when written twenty-three centuries ago. The changes made have been demanded by present requirements to redeem the revival from an imputation of childishness and incompleteness.

As music accompanied earliest dramatic performances, it was right that it should be also heard in conjunction with the play at Syracuse. It was no easy matter, as little knowledge remains of the music performed on such occasions; but Signor Romagnoli has supplied the want.

The Greeks, it will be remembered, regarded music as important to education. Plato and Aristotle advocated the musical education of youth. Music was closely allied with Poetry. The art was then in its infancy; it consisted first of vocal effort with minor instrumental accompaniment. "No trace exists of instrumental music apart from the vocal. Greek music was developed from the hymns addressed to a deity by a priest, or

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a band of worshippers: the instruments, at first a mere adjunct, ultimately attained a separate artistic existence, but never rivalled in importance the human voice." ¹

The voice was therefore regarded as the chief method of conveying musical sound. The latter was subservient to the words, only intended to emphasize their meaning, make them more convincing. This was in accordance with the sound principle of Greek art: the presentation and augmentation of τὸ καλόν = the beautiful ideal. Music, as a science, if it had its origin in the illustration of, or emphasizing poetry, certainly owes its development to being its companion. The Greek choruses, with music as a subsidiary, or enhancer of effect, are an example.

It would seem that this notable fact has been lost sight of to-day, to the detriment of vocal music. The inane words, allied with operatic music of the last century,

¹ R. D. Archer-Hind.

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which have often little or no importance, is a proof. Such small account, indeed, is taken of words set to music, that their authors' names seldom appear in programmes. Words of songs, also, are mutilated, or pronounced so indistinctly by singers, that an audience knows not even in what language they may be—and probably does not care. That good vocal music must find conception, if not inspiration, in the words, is not considered. The Greeks—true artists—demanded otherwise. The proper rendering of the *word*—and the signification of the *word*—were their conception of this form of Art.

It is interesting to note, also, that Greek music was first either in unison or octaves. Other parts were added by instruments accompanying the voices with a kind of simple counterpoint: instruments then took more than one part. Aristotle states that the melody was always below the accompaniment. Greek instruments were restricted in number. The aulos, with the tone of a

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clarinet, "was regarded as a particularly exciting instrument, rivalling the human voice in its effect." The kithara had about seven strings, and was played by the fingers, or a plectrum. The salpex was an instrument restricted to soldiers. The syrinx was a row of reeds fastened by wax, used by the shepherds and known to us as the pipes of Pan. Those were the principal instruments used by the Greeks.

Professor Romagnoli, who has also composed music for the revivals of the plays of Euripides and Aristophanes, has partly modelled his present composition on Greek themes contained in those few fragments of hymns recently found in Delphos. It is marked by solemn themes exclusively accompanied by reed instruments and harps—always dignified, always subdued. The most striking were a short symphony, heralding the news of the fall of Troy at the beginning, and the funeral dirge at the end of the play, when the body of Agamemnon was carried out to burial. The

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one or two choruses interpolated and sung by the crowd were scarcely heard to advantage.

Of the performance of the play much must be said in unstinted praise, especially of the acting and diction of the principal characters. Once more the remarkable acoustic properties of a Greek Theatre were demonstrated. Not a syllable was lost, despite the difficulties of speaking in so large a space in the open air. From the opening to the final speech not a word escaped the large audience of seven or eight thousand persons.

The grim lesson that Æschylus imparts in the "Oresteia," that retribution assuredly follows crime; that evil engenders evil and is frequently transmitted from generation to generation, was listened to with rapt attention by those thousands of people.

The hum of casual conversation was instantly stilled by the first words of the play, when the Watchman on his tower, weary with waiting for the signal flame, bewails his long watches of the night, his

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sorrow for the woe that broods over the palace below, because "not by honour guided as of old."

A chant accompanied by harps is heard. Maidens emerge from the palace to tend the fires on the altars. In procession come from right and left the Chorus, old men "in grey honoured eld, feeble of frame," to range themselves twelve on either side of Dionysus' altar.

They apostrophize Queen Clytemnestra, seen under the portico of the palace. They speak of the curse which lies upon the house of Atreus, describing in intense pathos the murderous sacrifice of Iphigenia; and their own decrepitude, which kept them from sharing the glory of the fall of Troy.

Clytemnestra relates triumphantly to them how, to the Atrides' roof, "the lord of fire sent forth his sign; and on, and ever on, beacon to beacon spread the courier flame"¹—a vivid tale of that flying fire, from peak

¹ The translation here adopted is taken from "The House of Atreus," by E. D. A. Morshead.

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to peak, reflected on sea and sky, the token of victory so long awaited, so ardently desired.

Action now takes the place of rumour, conjecture gives way to facts. An Argive Herald from the walls of Troy appears, to tell of losses as well as conquest—loss of the bravest and best beloved, sufferings from gaping wounds and the bitter cold, “when birds lay stark and stiff, so stern was Ida’s snow.”

Clytemnestra interrupts the Herald’s story to begin her own studied tale of deceit, feigning joy at her lord’s return. But the omniscient Chorus warn the credulous messenger “to learn by clear interpreters her specious word,” not to rely on it. The afternoon sun is shining brightly from a deep blue sky as loud cries of welcome break from the crowd of Argives now gathered about the palace. Agamemnon, passing through the Gateway of Lions, appears in his two-horsed chariot. He refers with dignified mien to his successful exploits, his gratitude to the gods for their protection, his pleasure at the wel-

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come he has received. Then the "mighty Atreides, admiral of the famous thousand-masted fleet," the conqueror of Troy, descends from his chariot, saying: "To my palace, and the shrines of home, I will pass in, and greet you, first and fair, ye gods, who bade me forth and home again"—that home wherein he is now to find the death which the chances of war had spared him before the walls of Troy.

Clytemnestra greets him with fair words, but with hatred and fear in her heart. Now is nigh the moment for the revenge long nurtured because Agamemnon slew their daughter in sacrifice to propitiate the gods, who had denied a favourable wind to the fleet about to set forth for the siege of Troy. Now is come the time to secure the guilty love of Ægisthus in undisturbed possession. The greeting is unique in tragic drama for its tale of "effusive insincerity and ominous words of double meaning." "If I slept," she falsely tells the King, "each sound—the tiny

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humming of a gnat, roused me again and again from fitful dreams wherein I felt thee smitten, saw thee slain."

Agamemnon turns his thoughts to the captive Cassandra—"she, the prize and flower of all we won, . . . gift of the army to its chief and lord," whom he has brought with him in his chariot. Clytemnestra contemptuously bids her pass into the palace, telling her "'Tis a fair chance to serve within a home of ancient wealth and power." But seeing that Cassandra makes no response, she commends her to the Chorus. "See ye to her; unseemly 'tis for me, unheeded thus, to cast away my words."

To be in readiness for the crime now at hand, she enters the palace, where Agamemnon has preceded her.

The great scene of the tragedy, in which Cassandra bemoans her fate, follows. Her words ring out "alternately wild with the actual inspiration of prophecy, piteous with the sense of weakness, of the inevitable doom

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awaiting her"—the worst of dooms, which is to "know much and yet avail nothing." Her wail is "sometimes one long sigh, sometimes a voice broken with thick sobs": "Woe, woe for me!" Again the agony: "Dread pain that sees the future all too well." "Sometimes strong and queenly with pride and scorn": "I too will pass, and like them dare to die!" "Sometimes frantic with hysterical terror": "The cup of agony whereof I chant, foams with a draught for me!" Lastly "grave with the pathos of confronted death." Her confused brain visions the murder of herself and of Agamemnon; she sees, as in a dream, yet clearly, the awful tragedies that brood over the home of the Atrides—the spectres of Thyestes' children, and the eventual fate of Clytemnestra, killed by her son to avenge his father's death.

The great climax of that remarkable scene comes when, on the threshold of the palace, where death awaits her, she, imbued with the deep sense of prophecy, starts back aghast,

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crying aloud, "The house fumes with stench and spilth of blood. 'Tis rank as charnel-scent from open graves." Then she passes to her fate.

Agamemnon's agonized cry of death: "O I am sped—a deep, a mortal blow!" now comes from the palace, and Clytemnestra's crime is consummated. As she emerges from the door, a bloodstained battle-axe in hand, she renews her vindication to the Chorus, who, horror-stricken, load her with reproaches for her crime, for her savage exultation at her deeds of blood. She avows all without dismay. "I stand with foot set firm upon a finished thing. At each wound he cried aloud; then, as in death relaxed each limb, he sank to earth; and as he lay once more I smote him with the last third blow."

To the protest of the Chorus: "Woman, what deadly birth, what venom'd essence of earth or dark distilment of the wave, to thee such passion gave?" she answers proudly, "Praise or blame even as ye list—I reckon not

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of your words." She taunts them with their former silence when they "had no voice of old to launch such doom on him, my husband, when he held as light my daughter's life as that of sheep and goat—yea, slew in sacrifice his child and mine." "Storm out your threats," she continues menacingly; "yet knowing this forsooth . . . it shall be yours to learn by chastisement a late humility." Cassandra's death claims her wrathful and jealous notice: "She, as a dying swan, sang her last dirge, and lies, as erst she lay, close to Agamemnon's side."

Ægisthus, at once avenger of a past crime, guilty lover of the present, appears to hail the "dawn of the day of rightful vengeance," exulting to see slain his king, son of him who wronged his father, him whom he himself has betrayed. He relates how Agamemnon's father, Atreus, bid his brother Thyestes to a feast, and "with zeal that was not love he feigned to hold in loyal joy a day of festal cheer, and set before him flesh that was his

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children once." He further goads the Chorus to fury and threats of vengeance, by glorying in the share he has had in the murder of Agamemnon, until Clytemnestra intervenes to calm their fury. "Enough, my champion, we will smite no more," she says. "Already have we reaped enough the harvest-field of guilt: enough of wrong and murder: let no other blood be spilt." Then she addresses the Chorus: "Peace, old men! and pass away, lest ill valour meet our vengeance. Enough of toils and troubles—be the end, if ever, now."

The tragedy, as is well known, closes with the threat of retribution to come, voiced by the old men, as they slowly and falteringly turn to follow the corpse of Agamemnon as it emerges from the palace on the way to burial, amid the sobs of the populace.

As the last echoes of the funeral dirge quaver on the evening air, the sun goes down in glory behind the mountains of the plain, and the tragedy of Æschylus is ended.

Of the actors nothing but praise can be

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written. The great dramatic talent of the Italians, which is a natural gift, found in the stirring lines of the play ample scope for demonstration. Both in action and diction the result was admirable. It was a lesson in histrionic art. Whether in the haughty salutation and lofty bearing of the King, or in the deceit and tragic defiance of the Queen, or again in the callous indifference of Ægisthus, parts excellently played by Gualtiero Tumiati, Teresa Mariani, and Giulio Tempesti, artistic realization was secured and anticipation satisfied. Perhaps a higher excellence still was reached by Giosué Borsi in the character of the Herald; and especially by Elisa Berta Mari as Cassandra, whose rendering of the doomed prophetess of evil carried with it much of the awful significance with which Æschylus has supremely endowed the part. Nor should the fine fulfilment of the important duties of Chorus be omitted from this meed of praise; because careful intelligence on their part added its notable share to

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a performance which must always remain in the recollection of those who witnessed it as remarkable and very impressive.

The revival of this Greek Tragedy at Syracuse must not be regarded as an ordinary performance of a play to serve as a pastime, or for the sake of profit. The object of those who have promoted it was above and beyond that. It has been a spontaneous act of homage, not only to the genius of a great Poet in whom the Syracusans see one of their own kin, but a tribute of respect, almost of veneration, for the first principle and aim of Art—the inculcation of beauty in thought and expression of which in its deeper interpretation Æschylus was so eminent an exponent.

The love of Italians for the ideal and the comely, which has come down to them from the ages and is with them as an innate sentiment, has here found expression and affirmation not only as a source of present artistic enjoyment, but also as an indication of the hope that the influence of great achievements

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like that of Æschylus may reach once again far afield to inspire, and inspiring, create.

Such was the moving spirit, underlying other reasons of less moment, which has roused so great an interest about this revival, and has brought so many people from afar to witness the performance. No other reason can account for the rapt attention which followed all the phases of the play, the enthusiasm which attended its initial stages, the applause which greeted its conclusion.

Apart from the satisfaction of a legitimate curiosity aroused at witnessing a performance on the spot where it had been enacted more than two thousand years ago, apart from the pleasure derived from an artistic presentation, a deeper feeling of admiration has remained, the source of which may be traced to the recognition that something vital, fundamental, and essential not only to Art but to humanity, still lives in the words of the great Poets of Greece which neither the lapse of time has altered, nor changed conditions of life modified.

EPILOGUE

IN A GARDEN

(La Bonaventura)

IN A GARDEN

(La Bonaventura)

SAD, distraught with thoughts too heavy for his soul, desponding, seeking rest, his native land he left. Proud, resentful, throbbing with the pain that comes when brightness of a life is gone, protesting against a fate that seemed too hard to bear. Mindful of nought but selfish grief that blinded him to all save that. A cynic—not by nature, but warped by ease and comfort of a life that lived not except for the enjoyment of the hour. Young, yet old in certain ways. A scoffer, too, at things divine: not because he knew, nor thought, for knowledge never scoffs at noble things, but from unwillingness to grasp that which was beyond his ken. An idler, if you will, yet not an

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evil man, nor wont to damage others so that he might gain. . . .

Wearily his steps went wandering amid some shaded paths, where palms and plants of southern clime grow on shores lapped by waters of a lake. There, in gorgeous colour, the Indian canna flowers midst dark repose of coleas leaves, raising spikéd splendour from the earth, and red hybiscus turns its blushes to the sun. The shy and pale convolvulus awaits the dusk for life ;¹ cane-brakes, murm'ring in the breeze, speak of Grecian lovers in that sun-bless'd isle where Etna's fires burn brightly. Cypress rising darkly 'gainst the azure of the sky, like tap'ring spires. And flowers of every hue : begonia, creeping rose on pergola so trained to give the shade that's bless'd in summer's thirsting hours ; hydrangea, oleander—pink flower of fever's choice—and, cast among the cedars on the yielding sward, an amphora to hold the fruit of vines empurpling in the sun.

¹ *Ipomœa grandiflora*, which opens at night.

In a Garden

Save for hum of wingéd things among the flowers, and rustling of the leaves ; save, too, for laughter of a stream, which, bubbling from the clefts of Crocione's scoréd face, tumbled to the ripples of the lake in merriment subdued, silence lay heavily on all things live or dead.

A sense of pity filled his heart that he alone of mortals could not grasp the secret of so much loveliness.

He slept.

Then a peace for years unknown came as plenty to a starving land. He dreamt, as children dream of loving words and fond caress, of noble deeds and happiness. He felt once more the hand that soothed him in the agony of mind which disillusion leaves when boyhood learns the ways of man—his mother's hand, now cold in death ; the kiss which gave him faith and hope and prayer in days gone by. He heard again her voice.

And lo ! a Maiden, fair as sunrise on snowy peaks, to his startled sense appeared.

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"Tell me," he said at length, "what wondrous place is this where all things seem to show the love of one for whom all beauty lives?"

She smiled and cried: "The Garden of Good Fortune, man, so called because the joy of life may here be found by him who truly seeks to find in Nature's gifts the love of God, content, and peace, rather than, toiling, look for them in wayworn paths of life, where most things beautiful are lost or missed."

"But can it be," he asked, "that happiness is found, or heaven served, by silent adoration thus, absorbed, inert—a selfish life at best, which knows not others' woes, and cares not, so long as soul be steeped in ecstasy?"

"Nay! nay!" quoth she; "such lesson is not learned here, but precept nobler far than that; humble, 'tis true, yet in obedience to the Master's word. See how each plant doth add ungrudgingly its share to His great work on earth, each fulfils its duty, each duly bears

In a Garden

its part, joining in silent praise for the great gift of life."

She paused.

The voices of the dead came nigh to him who slept: not now the voice alone of her he loved and mourned, though that above the rest soared high in prayerful melody for him in pain.

The Maiden spoke again: "Say, too, are things of beauty, raising men's thoughts from sordid hopes to higher realms, of no account in His great scheme of love and joy? May not the scent that fills the air do His work of love in bringing back some scene, or friend, long lost to mind; or tender thought evoke for whom we grieve? Even with the perfume of a flower may we live again sweet moments of the past, and gladly dream of dear ones gone. Learn. All save mankind its duty knows and does. All save mankind leaves its work well done. Hence man this place the Garden of Good Fortune calls, for each herein may teach himself the lesson taught by minor

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things which they themselves have learnt so well—of doing, humbly striving. Mortals may scarce do more.”

She lightly touched his forehead with her lips. It was the Touch of Nature that makes all men kin.

He woke and prayed.

